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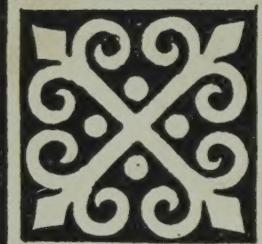
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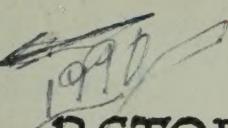
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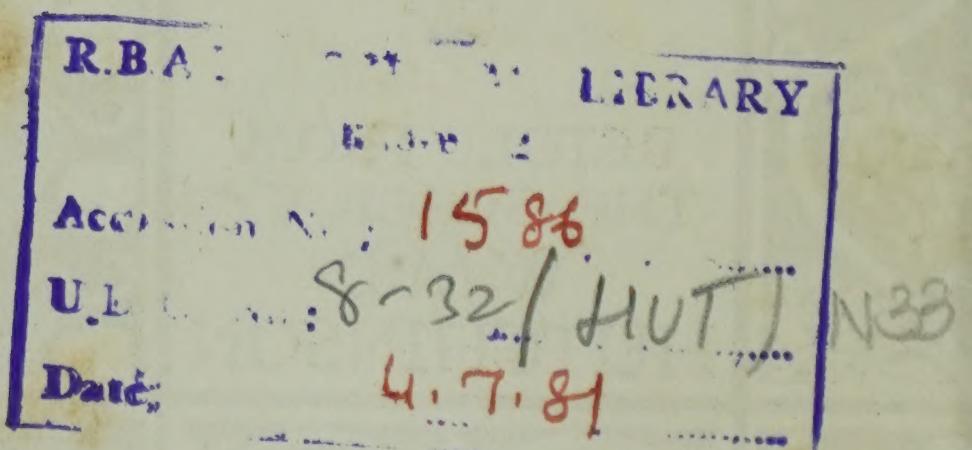


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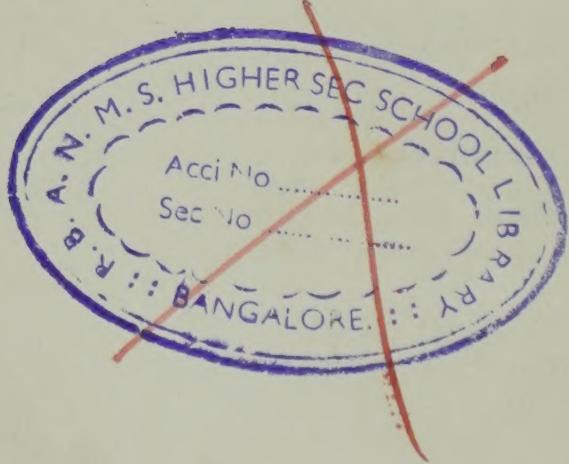
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THE ISLAND WITCH

Who knows not Circe,
The daughter of the Sun, whose charmèd cup
Whoever tasted lost his upright shape,
And downward fell into a grovelling swine?

Comus.

But I have seen,
Pointing her shapely shadows from the dawn
And image tumbled on a rose-swept bay,
A drowsy ship of some yet older day;
And, wonder's breath indrawn,
Thought I—who knows, who knows—but in that same
(Fished up beyond Aeaea, patched up new
—Stern painted brighter blue—)
That talkative, bald-headed seaman came
(Twelve patient comrades sweating at the oar)
From Troy's doom-crimson shore,
And with great lies about his Wooden Horse
Set the crew laughing, and forgot his course.

JAMES ELROY FLECKER.

I

'COURAGE, men,' said the captain of the galley,
'here is land at last, praise the gods. We are
close in—now row with a will, for right ahead
I spy a wooded cove where the water runs deep
inshore. There we can moor the ship, and feel
the good earth under our feet again.'

The crew answered only with groans; but they bent doggedly to their oars, and soon the black-prowed galley lay alongside a quay of rock in the natural harbour.

The captain stepped first ashore. He was a smallish man of about fifty; lean as a greyhound, deep-chested, with remarkably broad shoulders, and arms on which the muscles stood out like whipcord. Flecks of grey showed in his matted hair and beard, his tanned face was deeply lined; but he moved with the springing gait of youth, and the eyes that peered from between his wrinkled eyelids were bright and hungry as a falcon's. Unkempt, in stained and tattered garments, he had yet the air of one accustomed to command.

His crew, some two dozen in number, were as gaunt and weather-beaten as he. They stumbled ashore like men half dead with weariness; after drinking thirstily from a stream that ran sparkling down to the cove, they dragged themselves to the nearest shade, and fell at once into the deep sleep of exhaustion. And the captain, after some peeping and prying into the thick copsewood round about, lay down and slumbered, or seemed to slumber, like the rest.

The sun was rising when that haggard ship's

company made their landfall; all day he journeyed through a clear and windless heaven, and went down in splendour to his ocean bed. Night followed, mild and starry—and still they slept on. It was high noon of another cloudless day before they began to wake, one after another, and gather by the ship's side. Then arose cries of dismay—for the captain was nowhere to be seen. These rough sailors looked at each other with scared faces; some fell to whimpering like lost children; others muttered: 'He has deserted us', and cursed under their breath.

'No, no,' exclaimed a young seaman. 'That he never would—fie on you to say it! He must have gone scouting, to find us food and shelter, as he has done many 's the time.'

'Ay, Elpenor, and dear enough we have paid for his scouting,' said another sailor bitterly. 'Wherever we put in, 'tis the same story. Instead of filling our water-kegs, lifting a few sheep or goats, and making off quietly, nothing will serve Odysseus but to go looking for the folk of the place and try what he can wheedle out of them. Folk, indeed! Ghosts, monsters, devils—they are all the folk we have met, or are like to meet, in these accursed seas beyond the world's end.'

'You forget the gentle Lotus Eaters,' inter-

rupted Elpenor. ‘Not I,’ said the other. ‘Gentle enough they are, and made us welcome to share their food. But why? Because they would have others fall under the same spell that has made them more like wraiths and phantoms than living men. They walk in a daydream; wife, children, homeland, are no more to them than an old song of little meaning. Odysseus did wisely, no doubt, to drag aboard by force our shipmates that tasted the lotus. And yet’—with a heavy sigh—‘better have dreamed our lives away on that pleasant shore than perish miserably one by one through his foolhardiness and greed.’

‘Eurylochus,’ said Elpenor, ‘we all know you for a born grumbler—one that will still be talking, and is more for talking than doing. Ever the first at a feast and the last at a fray—there’s the proverb to fit you, comrade. But keep your long tongue off our captain, for I will not hear him slandered so grossly.’

‘Slandered, say you?’ exclaimed Eurylochus. ‘By all the gods, I speak mere truth of him, and I dare you to deny it. Ay, for I have witnesses you cannot gainsay—our poor shipmates that the one-eyed giant killed and devoured in his cave. Who took them there? Who would not come away when they begged him, but must needs

wait for that savage, to see if he would give him a present? And so six of our best men died horribly, before Odysseus escaped with the rest. *He* came off safe, mark you! He always does—it is other men's lives he stakes on his desperate throws, the shrewd fellow!

'You lie,' retorted Elpenor angrily. 'Odysseus ran the same risk as those six hapless ones. Nothing but divine providence kept him from suffering the same doom.'

'Do you tell me that, now?' said Eurylochus, smiling sourly. 'Then I warrant divine providence made him anchor his own ship outside the harbour of the Laestrygons, and send the rest of the fleet inside—where the crews were speared to a man by those cannibals?'

'Doubtless,' said Elpenor gravely, 'and but for that, you and I and our whole ship's company would have been butchered too.'

'Ay, that is true enough . . . we should all have been dead men . . . speared in the water like porpoises . . .' chorused the listening crew.

And they shuddered, remembering the glimpse they had had of that horror, and the hideous roar of savages, mingled with the death-shrieks of their comrades, that rang in their ears as they rowed madly out to sea. •

They had been toiling at the oar ever since—for there was a dead calm—through unknown seas. The only food they had left was black bread and a few onions; there was no more water, but Odysseus had unsealed for them the last jar of the noble wine he had looted from Apollo's priest in Ciconia. And more than the wine, his invincible cheerfulness had kept heart in them until they sighted land once again; and once again could at least feel solid ground under their feet instead of the eternal heaving of the ship. For the moment that had sufficed. A sort of horror of the great deep possessed these voyagers, so long tossed upon its bosom; it was very heaven to them to be ashore—no matter where. Only let them sleep off their deadly weariness, and the morrow might take thought for the things of itself. But now the morrow was come; and it seemed they must face its unknown trials without the indomitable leader who had won their confidence—though not their love. Only Elpenor, young and warm-hearted, was attached to him.

And it was Elpenor who now joyously exclaimed: ‘What did I tell you, comrades? Look, here comes brave Odysseus, with our dinner!’

Then even the surly Eurylochus could not forbear to cheer as Odysseus came up, bent almost

double under the still warm carcase of a huge stag, which was slung round his neck by a rope of green withes tied to its feet. He threw down his load, drew a long breath, and said cheerily:

'See, my men, what the good fairies hereabouts have given you! Pitying us poor mariners, they sent this monstrous beast across my path as I went foraging through the woods. My spear did the rest—'twas a good throw, though I say it that should not—right through his spine went the point, and stuck so fast, I could scarce tug it out again. Well, there was he, dead; and there was I, wondering how to bring him away. Dragging him was out of the question, for there are no paths in these woods, I may tell you. However, not to be beaten, I twisted me a rope of green withes, knotted his four feet together, and made shift to hoist him on to my back. So now for a meal of good roast meat, that will put fresh life into us. What, comrades, all's not lost yet, you see! Let us eat and drink, and forget care till to-morrow.'

The hungry crew needed no urging to light fires of driftwood, and to flay and cut up the gigantic stag. Soon a delicious smell of broiling venison gladdened their hearts; and the meal that followed, washed down with good wine,

made the most inveterate grumblers ready to swear for the nonce that Odysseus was the best captain that ever sailed the seas.

II

Odysseus had made certain observations, before his lucky encounter with the stag, which he thought best to keep to himself until the next day. He then called a council of the crew, and thus addressed them:

'Friends all, we must mind what we are about; for I am sorry to tell you we are not out of our troubles yet. For one thing, we have clean lost our bearings; and whereabouts we are there is no knowing. Next, this land we have made is only a small island; yesterday I climbed a peak that overlooks the whole of it, and saw nothing all around but grey sea, stretching to the horizon. I saw, too, that the isle is all forest, and town or hamlet there is none; only, in one place, a single spire of blue smoke was curling up from among the trees. That smoke comes from a house; and the next thing is to go and see who live there, and find out from them what part of the world this is that we have come to.'

Now the crew no sooner heard that here was

no mainland nor town, but a lonely isle with but one dwelling upon it, than they burst into sobs and tears; then cried out that this place would be the death of them, as the countries of the Cyclopes and the Laestrygons had been to their comrades; and all but Elpenor clamoured to put to sea forthwith. Odysseus heard them calmly; then he said: ‘While I am your captain, I will be obeyed. But if you mutiny—take the ship and sail whither you choose; as for me, I will bide here’.

And at that their hearts failed them for fear; so they grudgingly said they would do his bidding.

‘That is well,’ said Odysseus; ‘now let us divide into two companies, one to go on this service, and the other to guard the ship. Come, Eurylochus, you and I will each pick twelve men by turns; you shall lead one company, as I the other; and we two will cast lots. The one whose lot comes out first, away he goes.’

The sides were quickly chosen; then Odysseus put a red pebble, and Eurylochus a white one, into a bronze helmet held by a sailor; it was the white pebble that bounced out first as the man shook the helmet up and down. Thereupon Eurylochus and his company made off into the woods, very loath, and even weeping; and those

who remained on the beach with Odysseus had tears in their eyes too, as they watched them depart. The minds of all were oppressed with gloomy forebodings; there was something uncanny about the stillness and silence of this isle, where no birds sang and not a leaf rustled in the dark woods; where even the voice of the sea sank to a whisper.

A strange, eager cry broke the stillness. The next moment Eurylochus darted out of the wood, flung himself down on the beach among his astonished comrades, and lay there, shaken with sobs. For a while he could say nothing, and seemed as one struck dumb by fear; it was in vain that the sailors plied him with questions—what had happened, and where were the others? Odysseus put them aside, and in quiet, soothing tones bade Eurylochus take courage, for he was safe now, and among friends. And this so steadied the man that he sat up and began to tell his tale of his own accord.

'Captain,' he said, 'I and my company went right on through the woods, looking for that house you saw the smoke of; and before long we came to a clearing among the trees—and there, sure enough, stood a great house built of hewn

stone, like a king's palace. But, for my part, I smelt sorcery about the place; for as we approached, a pack of wolves and lions came slinking round us, and fawned on us as house-dogs do on their master at feeding-time. Still, up to the house we went, and stood outside the great, shining doors—gold they were, or of bronze as bright as gold. Then we heard from within the voice of someone singing—and the tune was such as women sing at their weaving, and the voice like a woman's voice, only more heavenly sweet than any woman's. Then one of us—'twas Polites, that you like best of us all—Polites said: "Be she woman or goddess who sings so sweetly, let us call to her". So we all gave a shout: "Open, you within there!"—and suddenly the doors were opened wide. A tall woman stood on the threshold smiling; she greeted us very courteously, and desired us to go in and drink a cup of wine. And the rest of us went in, glad enough, but I slipped behind a bush and waited there, for my heart misgave me when I looked on that woman's face. She shut those shining doors behind my mates, and I heard her laugh as she did so. . . . With that, I knew for certain they would never come out of those doors alive. I waited and waited, but there was never a sign

of them, and not a sound from within the house. . . . And there were those tame beasts crouching round about, watching me with their yellow eyes! At last I could bear the terror no more . . . and what good was it to stay? Those poor lads walked into a trap, and they are past help—dead already, belike.'

'That is what I must know,' said Odysseus; 'so come on, man, and show me the way to this palace of yours.'

But Eurylochus fell on his knees and cried imploringly:

'No, no, captain, for pity's sake, don't make me go back to that accursed house! I tell you, some evil thing lives there—ay, this isle is haunted by devils—you will never come back if you venture into yonder woods.'

The captain's thin lips set grimly, and a gleam came into his eyes.

'Eurylochus,' he said, 'you had better stop here, and have your dinner and a drink—which you seem to be in want of. And the others can stay with you, to look after the ship. But I am going to see what has become of our comrades. For that, I take it, is my duty.'

So saying, he fetched from the ship a bow and quiver, and a silver-hilted sword which he buckled

to his belt; and without more words he went off at a round pace into the woods.

III

As Odysseus had said, there were no paths in that forest, but he went straight on, keeping always uphill, for by the smoke he had seen he judged that the house he was making for stood on high ground in the centre of the island. He had not gone far when, in an open glade, he saw someone advancing towards him. It was a beautiful, merry-faced lad, who carried a shining, golden wand. Golden also were his sandals and the thongs that tied them to his ankles. ‘Hail, friend!’ cried the stranger, and coming up to Odysseus he took him by the hand. ‘Tell me who I am,’ he said, smiling.

‘You are Hermes,’ answered Odysseus, looking at him reverently, but without fear. ‘I know you by your wand and sandals, O Guide of Wayfarers! Be good to me now, as you ever are to travellers in need, and show me the house I am seeking.’

‘Odysseus,’ said the friendly god, ‘you little know the danger you would run into so rashly. Think you you can rescue your comrades out of

that house, or from her who dwells there? I tell you no—for she is the witch Circe, the daughter of the Sun, who knows all spells and enchantments under heaven. She dwells apart from gods and men in this isle of Aeaea, and all her delight is working mischief to luckless mortals that chance brings here. By her magic she has turned those men of yours into swine; and they lie huddled in a sty—where you will soon join them, unless I help you. But for that I am come; listen well, then, and I will tell you how to deal with the witch.

‘First, you must carry hidden in your breast a certain amulet I will give you. And when you come to Circe’s door she will bid you welcome, and give you a cup of wine which she has drugged with magic herbs—as she did to your comrades. They no sooner drank than she struck them with her wand, bidding them quit human shape and take that of swine, and thus will she do to you. But drink of her cup without fear; for your amulet will make it harmless. Then, soon as she lifts her wand, draw your good sword on the witch and make as if to kill her. She will beg for mercy, which you must grant, for only she can undo the spell on your comrades; but beware you trust her not, nor take anything she offers,

until you have bound her by the great oath of the gods to do you no harm. Beware, I say, lest she weave other spells, that will hold you in vile durance for evermore—among those beasts that once were men. . . . And now I will give you the amulet.'

So saying, Hermes turned his shining eyes on the greensward at their feet, and after a quick glance or two, pointed with his wand to a little milk-white flower, half hidden in the grass.

'There it is,' he said blithely. 'I knew I should find some growing about here. Have you ever seen this flower before, Odysseus—you that are such a great traveller?'

'I may have,' returned Odysseus dryly; 'but if so, I never noticed it. I have had other queer things to look at on my travels than the weeds underfoot.'

'Also,' said Hermes, smiling, 'you thought an amulet given by a god would be some precious and rare jewel—not a weed, as you call it. But know, Odysseus, that this small, humble plant is more precious than ruby or emerald, and far more rare. The deadliest poisons, the most potent philtres witch ever brewed, cannot hurt him that wears it. But it grows not in all soils, and few there be that find it.'

'Grant me pardon, divine one,' said Odysseus, 'for I spoke as a fool. What is the name of this sovereign plant, I pray you?'

'It is so little known among men,' answered Hermes, 'that they have no name for it, but in the language of the gods it is called *Moly*.'

'I will pluck this same blessed *Moly*,' said Odysseus, and he stretched out his hand to the plant.

'Do not touch it, I charge you,' cried Hermes, seizing his arm. 'Its virtue lies not in the flower but the root, which no mortal may pull up and live. For being torn from the earth, it gives forth a dying groan, and that sound strikes the hearer dead. But to a god's hand it yields easily and in silence.'

With that, he stooped down and gently pulled up the plant, root and all, and gave it to Odysseus. The root was jet-black, and in shape like a forked radish. Odysseus put the amulet carefully inside his tunic, then turned to thank the giver. But Hermes had vanished, suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, after the manner of the Immortals. So Odysseus went on alone to the house of Circe.

IV

'And this is the place,' said Odysseus, glancing warily about him, 'that so frightened Eurylochus. Well, small blame to him, for the strangeness of it might daunt a braver man. Here is a house for kings to envy—all built of polished marble, and the doors overlaid with fine gold—in the midst of a desert island. And not a living creature anywhere to be seen—except those sleek, fawning beasts that follow one at heel like dogs, as Eurylochus said. Wolves and panthers—ay, that is what you are now, but the gods alone know what you have been. . . . Ah, now I hear Circe singing. . . . But this time she has left the doors ajar . . . so I 'll take a peep at her.' And he stole forward on tiptoe.

The room he peered into seemed almost dark to his eyes, after the brilliant sunshine outside. But he could presently see it was a stately hall, with marble walls and pillars that gleamed white in the dusk. At the far end a fire of cedar-wood glowed, scenting the air; and near the hearth, with the firelight playing upon it, stood a tall silver loom. And thereon Circe was weaving a

great, shimmering web, finer than any mortal handiwork. To and fro she paced as she cast the shuttle, keeping time to her low, sweet song. Her back was turned towards Odysseus; and for a while he stood watching the rhythmic grace of her motions like one entranced. It seemed to him that he could listen to that song, and watch that slender, swaying figure, for ever. . . . But he roused himself, and drew back a little, and called out: ‘Ho, within there!’ as strangers do at a house-door. In an instant, the doors were flung wide, and the witch stood regarding him with a smile.

‘You shall not scare me as you did Eurylochus,’ thought Odysseus; and he returned her gaze steadily. But his heart beat faster the while, for in all his wanderings he had seen nothing so rich and strange.

The Daughter of the Sun wore a scarlet robe, girded and clasped with great rubies; her hair, in gloss and tint like burnished copper, was heaped in a silver net studded with yellow pearls. She was pale—save for her lips, which were red as pomegranate flowers—but with a warm, translucent pallor; the eyes she now fixed upon Odysseus were green as emerald, lovely, and malign. Beautiful she was not; but in the grace

of her every movement, and in her golden voice, lay a lure more potent than beauty.

And now all came to pass that Hermes foretold. For Circe bade Odysseus welcome, and led him in, and made him sit in a silver-studded chair with a footstool under his feet.

'Rest there, stranger,' said she, 'and I will spice some wine for you—for I see you are weary.'

And Odysseus, covertly watching, saw her pour wine into a golden cup, and drop something therein from a small amber box. Then she brought him the cup, and he drank, trusting in Hermes. Instantly Circe snatched up a black wand from a table near, and lightly striking him, cried in a new and terrible voice: 'Off, swine, to your sty, and herd with your fellows!'

Brave though Odysseus was—and no braver man ever lived—he shuddered at that instant. Erect, rigid, the witch towered over him, her baleful eyes blazing . . . a hellish energy seemed to radiate from her. . . . If the amulet should fail! . . . But it did not fail; the dreaded change came not; and the next moment he sprang with drawn sword at Circe, murder in his eye.

'Ah, ah, ah!' she screamed, throwing herself at his feet. 'Who and what are you, that can withstand my spell?'

And then, clasping his knees: ‘I am your suppliant—kill me not!’ she said. ‘Ah, stranger, never mortal but you has drunk of yonder cup and kept the form of man. Tell me your name, your country—but methinks I can guess it! Are not you that Odysseus who Hermes of the Golden Wand has often told me would visit my isle, sailing homeward from Troyland?’

‘I am the man, Circe,’ replied Odysseus sternly; ‘but had I known your fashion of entertaining strangers, your isle should never have seen me.’

‘Nay, forgive me, great chieftain,’ said she cajolingly, ‘for how could I know this was you? Come, sheathe your sword, and let me make you amends.’

Then he did sheathe his sword; and Circe rose up, and taking him by the hand she made him sit beside her on an ivory couch spread with rich coverlets. And forthwith she began wooing him to stay with her and be her lover, saying that all the wealth and pleasures of her palace should be his if he would consent.

But coldly he answered: ‘Circe, let me hear no more of such talk. How is it possible I should love *you*, who have transformed my poor crew into swine by your black art—ay, and would serve me the same, for all your pretence of

fondness, if I were to trust you? But that I will not . . . unless you swear by the great oath of the gods never to harm me'.

Circe looked at him in silence for a moment, then smiling: 'You are even wiser,' she said, 'than Hermes told me. But since you will have an oath from me, and know the one that alone can bind me—I will swear it'.

And rising up she spoke these words in a loud, solemn tone: 'By the water of Styx, dreadful, divine, I swear I will never work evil to Odysseus, son of Laertes, by thought, word, or deed'.

After that he was content to let her do what she would with him, knowing that he could only deliver his comrades by winning her favour.

V

'Now you shall see I am a good hostess,' said Circe. She clapped her hands, and four beautiful damsels came into the hall, laden with all things needful for a banquet. One placed seats, which she spread with purple coverlets, before a table of solid silver; one covered the table with gold dishes full of savoury meats. The third brought gold drinking-cups and a great silver bowl, which she filled with wine; and the fourth set a bronze

cauldron full of water on the fire. Odysseus learned afterwards that these handmaids were Wood-fays, whom Circe had made thralls by her enchantments. When the water boiled in the cauldron, they made ready the bath in a marble-paved bathing-room; and Circe herself poured the warm, refreshing shower over him, rubbed him with fragrant oil, and arrayed him in fine linen. Then she led him back to the hall, seated him beside the richly spread table, and bade him eat.

But Odysseus could not touch the delicious food, for his soul loathed it as he thought of his wretched comrades, and pictured them grovelling in the sty. He sat silent, with gloomy countenance, tasting neither meat nor drink, until at last Circe said:

‘What ails you, Odysseus, that you sit there like a dumb man, and look so woe-begone, and will not eat or drink? Are you still expecting some sorcery? Come, put away such fears—they are but cowardly, now I have sworn that mighty oath to you.’

‘Ah, Circe,’ said he, with a deep sigh. ‘What man of any loyalty could bear to feast and make merry, so long as his friends lie in miserable bondage? Nay, first let me see my trusty comrades at liberty again.’

'Come, then,' answered the witch, and glided swiftly from the hall, wand in hand. Odysseus followed her across a wide courtyard to the door of a sty; she flung it open, and drove out the herd—nine-year-old boars they seemed, gaunt and bristly. She waved her wand, and they stood stock still before her, while she sprinkled each with drops from a phial, muttering mystic words. And then, with trembling, Odysseus saw the bristles fall from their skin, and their shape change like shapes in a dream; they stood up erect . . . and now they were *men*—the men he knew! Only, it seemed to him that they were younger, taller, and more comely than before.

'Is it you, is it you, captain?' they cried, crowding round him to grasp his hand, and sobbing for joy. Nor could he restrain his tears, and they all wept together, so loudly that the courtyard rang with it. Even Circe's heart was touched for the moment. 'Noble Odysseus,' she said, 'you and yours have nothing more to fear in this house. So go now and fetch the rest of your crew, that you may all feast and rejoice together. As for your ship, you must haul it ashore, and store your goods and tackle in the sea-cave close to your landing-place.'

Odysseus was willing enough, and made haste

back to the shore, where he found Eurylochus and the rest sitting idle, overcome with misery and despair. Thankful they were to see him, but after the first moments of relief they broke out into bitter lamentations because he had come back alone. ‘What news of our dead?’ they wailed. ‘Tell us quickly.’

‘All in good time,’ said Odysseus cheerfully; ‘but first let us get the galley ashore, and stow our gear in the cave I see yonder. For I am going to take you all to the Lady Circe’s palace, where you will find our friends eating and drinking, and thinking themselves lucky to have gone there. Well they may, for they have good cheer in plenty, and everything else that heart can wish.’

And the rest were overjoyed, but Eurylochus cried out:

‘Don’t believe him, you fools! This Circe—if that is her name—has put some trick upon him. Mark my words, she is a witch; and if we go to her, she will turn us all into brute beasts—as *she has done with our comrades.* . . . How do I know? Because I saw *her*, and saw the creatures she keeps for watch-dogs—and I tell you, their eyes were the eyes of men. . . . What, haven’t you had warnings enough not to follow the captain

on his mad adventures? Have you forgotten the Cyclops' slaughter-house, I say?’

‘You mutinous hound,’ said Odysseus, his eyes flashing with rage. ‘Though you are a cousin of mine, I am in two minds whether to cut off your head.’

And he half drew his sword; but the other sailors began pleading: ‘Nay, never mind him, captain. . . . Let him stop here with his fears for company, but the rest of us will follow you to Circe’s house’.

‘So be it, then,’ said Odysseus.

Then he and the rest of the crew hauled their galley ashore, and stored goods and tackle in the cave, while Eurylochus looked on, scowling and silent. But when they set out for the house of Circe, he came slinking after them; for greatly as he dreaded witches and witchcraft, there was nothing in the world he was so much afraid of as his captain’s anger.

VI

And now began a pleasant time for these worn and weary mariners. Lodged and fed like princes in the house of Circe, they lived idle and secure, instead of toiling at the oar and

encountering continual perils from the savage seas and the yet more savage inhabitants of the coasts they touched upon. By day they could amuse themselves with hunting the deer, which abounded in the island; at nightfall came the banquet, with Circe playing the gracious hostess, and her train of Wood-fays—she had many besides the four that Odysseus saw at first—deftly serving the guests. And when the meal ended the men lay reclined, each with a golden wine-cup beside him which those lovely handmaids kept ever brimming—then Circe would delight them with her singing, or with some wonderful tale. Although she sang divinely, they liked the stories best, as is the way with sailors; this she quickly saw, and thereafter told them a new one every night. It seemed that she knew all the stories in the world—tales of the gods, adventures of heroes, and marvels to be seen in far countries. Odysseus, who was himself a great story-teller, professed to have heard many of Circe's tales before; but he listened to them as eagerly as his crew for all that. Sometimes, however, he would begin to fidget a little; then she would say, smiling:

'Now it is your turn, Odysseus. Let us hear one of your adventures at Troy.'

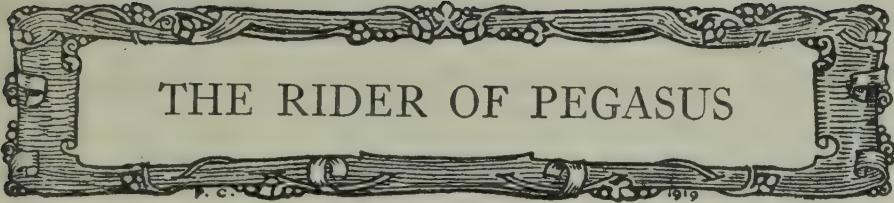
And he would tell about the Wooden Horse,

or some stratagem or night-raid of his own, which his men had heard a hundred times; but they did not mind, for he told it differently every time and always with the greatest liveliness. Even Eurylochus owned that to hear the captain tell a story was like seeing the thing happen with your own eyes—though he would add: ‘Not that I believe half the things *did* happen that he boasts about’.

In this manner of life, weeks and months slipped by before the crew began to think of home; Odysseus seemed as contented as they were—not without reason, for the island witch grew ever more gracious to him, and all the riches and pleasures of her palace were his to command. She left nothing undone to please him; to all appearance he was lord of herself and her house. But he soon found that he was not master of one thing—and that was his liberty. For Circe never let him out of her sight. If he wished to go hunting with his comrades, she must be of the party; if he stole out alone she would suddenly meet him, smiling inscrutably, with those tame wolves and panthers following dog-like at her heels. No words passed between them on the matter; after a while, Odysseus took to staying indoors. His comrades rallied him now and

then on his laziness; he answered lightly that he had earned a long rest. A very patient man, he sat day after day in Circe's hall, watching her shuttle go flashing through the loom — and waited. . . .

And always, at night, she told her stories. One or two of them are set down in this book; but it would take many books to hold them all, and not half of them have come down to later ages from that far springtime of the world when they were already old.



THE RIDER OF PEGASUS

Up led by thee,
Into the Heaven of Heavens I have presumed,
An earthly guest, and drawn empyreal air,
Thy tempering. With like safety guided down,
Return me to my native element;
Lest, from this flying steed unreined (as once
Bellerophon, though from a lower clime)
Dismounted, on the Aleian field I fall,
Erroneous there to wander and forlorn.

Paradise Lost, vii, 17.

‘ONE would think,’ said Circe, ‘that this Diomed of Argos was a greater warrior than Achilles himself, you praise him so highly. He is, indeed, the only Greek chieftain I have never heard you find any fault with. But is he really to be compared with that glorious son of the sea-queen Thetis, whose fame has reached even to this isle at the world’s end?’

Odysseus had just been telling how, with Diomed for sole companion, he raided the camp of the Thracian allies of Troy at dead of night, killed their prince and many of his men, and made prize of his famous horses. And not for the first time, he had spoken of Diomed’s prowess with a

warmth unusual in him—for as a rule he was chary of praise.

'No one can compare with Achilles,' he now said gravely, 'and if you had seen him, Circe, you would believe, as I do, that mankind will never look upon his like again. I may have found fault with him, for he was not perfect; but his very faults were noble. He could hate greatly, because he is so greatly loved. . . . But setting him aside, I will maintain there was no better soldier in our army than the gallant Diomed.'

'Yet I seem to have heard,' said Circe, 'the name of Ajax as second only to Achilles in strength and valour.'

At this the crew exchanged meaning glances, and Odysseus flushed a little.

'I never denied it,' he said hastily, 'but strength and valour alone do not make the complete soldier. He must have brains as well. The Greeks knew that, when they awarded the arms of Achilles not to Ajax but to me, though I was no match for him in fight. . . . But I dare say you have heard that story too—and anyhow it has nothing to do with what we were talking about. Let us get back to Diomed.'

'By all means,' said Circe, smiling a little maliciously.

‘Diomed,’ went on Odysseus, ‘though a young man, was as good in council as on the field. We older men—nay, the ancient Nestor himself—listened to his advice with respect. He had in perfection the two qualities that make a great soldier—the courage of the lion and the cunning of the fox. In action he was all lion, for he always fought fair; but the fox showed in a hundred instances I could tell you of—ambushes and spying and the like. And he never lost a chance of overreaching an enemy—ha, ha!—I laugh even now when I remember the trick he played on the Lycian prince Glaucus.’

‘Tell me about that,’ said Circe, taking the hint.

‘Well, you must know,’ said Odysseus, ‘that when they encountered in the battle, Diomed asked Glaucus who he was, for the Lycians were newly come to the help of the Trojans, and that day was the first they took the field. And Glaucus was all resplendent in golden armour, so that Diomed thought he was perhaps one of the Immortals—Ares or Apollo—who on that day and not then only fought in the ranks of Troy. Thereupon Glaucus told him both his name and lineage, and that he was grandson to the great hero Bellerophon, a prince of Corinth,

who gained the kingship of Lycia by prowess. And forthwith Diomed planted his spear in the ground, and declared that he would not fight with him. "For my grandsire, King Oineus," he said, "once had noble Bellerophon as his guest for twenty days, and they exchanged gifts in pledge of friendship. So we two are guest-friends by inheritance—you have a claim to my hospitality in Argos, and I to yours in Lycia. Come, there must be no fighting between you and me—the gods know, here is plenty of work for our spears, without that. Lay on, then, among the Greeks, as I will among the Trojans and their allies. But first let us exchange armour, that both sides may know we avoid combat because of ancestral friendship, and not through cowardice."

'Now Zeus, I think, took away the Lycian's wits, for he readily agreed, and so Diomed got golden armour in exchange for bronze—ha, ha!—ay, he got the price of a hundred oxen for the price of nine. And all by his ready wit.'

'My captain,' said young Elpenor, 'you spoke of Diomed overreaching his enemies, but surely this was overreaching a friend.'

'I do not see that,' replied Odysseus. 'Glaucus was fighting on the opposite side, and as for the tale of their grandsires' friendships—I am not

certain that Diomed had ever heard of Bellerophon before.'

'Do you mean he invented the story—to get the armour?' exclaimed the young man, horrified.

Odysseus shrugged his shoulders. 'He was quite clever enough,' he answered, 'but I have not said anything of the sort. All I say is, none of us except old Nestor had so much as heard the name of Bellerophon—and Diomed could tell us nothing about him, except what he learned from Glaucus. However, Nestor said he remembered hearing in his youth that the then King of Corinth had a son called Bellerophon, very beautiful, who left home on account of some trouble, and no one ever knew what became of him. "That was a good seventy years ago," he said, "so no wonder his very name has long been forgotten among the Greeks." . . . Well, this Bellerophon must have been a mighty man in his day; I would give something to know what took him to Lycia and how he made himself king there.'

'I can tell you the whole story,' said Circe; 'but I have a word to say first about your friend Diomed. It was true what he told Glaucus—Bellerophon did visit King Oineus, and they did pledge friendship to each other, when both were young. So you see, Diomed has not quite so

much of the fox as—someone else I could name.'

'If you mean me,' said Odysseus, laughing, 'I take it as a compliment. And praise from the wise Circe is doubly precious. But let us hear the story—I warrant it is a strange and moving one.'

'You shall judge,' answered Circe; and she told it as follows:

When Glaucus, son of Sisyphus the Wise, was king in Corinth, a great marvel befell there; for a Winged Horse appeared on the mountain called Acrocorinthus, hard by the city. A noble beast he was, white as snow, and his wings were like the wings of a swan. Now this was the Horse that sprang from the blood of Medusa the Gorgon, when the hero Perseus slew that dire creature and cut off her head. And no sooner was he born, on the Gorgon's Rock, far in the west, than he soared aloft and flew over land and sea till he came to Corinth — not without providence divine. Down he lighted on the steep hill-side, and looked about for water, that he might drink, but there was neither spring nor brook in sight. Then the Horse stamped with his hoof on the rocky ground, and there gushed forth the bright fount that men call Pirené unto this day. Now

certain woodcutters, who watched him afar off, saw this, and brought word to the city; so the Corinthians called the wondrous beast *Pegasus*, which means ‘He of the Well-spring’. And that was his name ever after. The woodcutters, as in duty bound, went straightway with this news to their lord the king; and his son Bellerophon eagerly undertook to capture the marvellous horse. But Pegasus, though he seemed both gentle and fearless, and suffered the prince to approach him, would not come within his reach. Three days Bellerophon spent on the mountain to no purpose; then he betook himself to a wise Seer that dwelt in Corinth and entreated his counsel. The Seer bade him go that night into the temple of Athena and sleep upon her altar. So Bellerophon slept all night on the altar-stone — and at daybreak he dreamed a dream. He dreamed that the goddess stood beside him, all in bright armour, and thus she spoke:

‘Sleepest thou, prince of the house of Aeolus? Arise, and take the gift I have brought thee, for by the magic in it thou shalt tame Pegasus when thou bindest it about his jaws. But first sacrifice a bull to Poseidon, Lord of Steeds, that he also may show thee favour.’

With that Bellerophon started up broad awake

—and behold, at his feet lay a shining, golden thing, the like of which he had never seen. For it was a horse's bit and bridle, the use whereof was as yet unknown among the Greeks. They drove horses in those days as they drove oxen, under the yoke; but they could not ride them, lacking, as it were, a rudder to guide them in career.

Glad at heart, Bellerophon showed Athena's gift to the Seer, and together they sacrificed a bull to Poseidon, as she had commanded. Then he went again to the mountain; and by the will of Athena, Pegasus quietly suffered himself to be bitted and bridled. Forthwith Bellerophon mounted his back and rode him home rejoicing. And the Corinthians built a temple to Athena of the Bridle, in memory of the great invention which she had bestowed on them first among all the cities of Greece.

After this, a heavy misfortune came on Bellerophon; for he killed his younger brother in a boar-chase, his spear glancing off a tree and piercing the boy's heart. And because he knew that the shedder of blood, albeit by misadventure, must be driven out of the land lest he bring a curse upon it, Bellerophon fled away from Corinth on his winged steed. Faring southward, he came

to the ancient city of Argos; there Proetus the king entertained him hospitably, and grew every day more pleased with his guest. For he had never seen a young man so comely in person or of such courteous and winning manners.

Unhappily for Bellerophon, he found no less favour with the wife of King Proetus, who was as wicked as she was beautiful. There came a day when this wanton dame led him on some pretext to her chamber, and wooed him in shameless terms to become her lover. But he turned from her with loathing, and fled out of the chamber. And at that slight put upon her, the queen's love changed to deadly hatred, so that she thirsted to destroy him. Swiftly she devised a way; having torn her robe and dishevelled her hair, she went to her husband and declared with tears that his Corinthian guest had offered her violence. And Proetus, nothing doubting her tale, swore that Bellerophon should die for his treachery; yet he durst not kill him under his own roof, dreading the vengeance of Zeus, God of Guest-right. So after pondering awhile, he sent for Bellerophon and with all his wonted friendliness asked if he would do him a service.

'Right willingly, my kind host,' answered Bellerophon, 'be it small or great.'

'It is an errand to a far country,' said Proetus. 'I wish to send a letter to my father-in-law, the King of Lycia, on an affair of weight. If you will take it, I shall be easy in my mind—for I know I can trust you.' And he smiled an evil smile.

'That you may,' said Bellerophon heartily. 'Give me the letter, king, and I will bear it across the sea as swiftly as my winged horse can fly.'

So Proetus wrote his letter on ivory tablets, and sealed them with his royal signet; and Bellerophon mounted Pegasus and flew eastward over the main. On the third day he came to the palace of the Lycian king, and gave the letter into his hand. But the king was troubled when he read it, for Proetus had written thus:

King Proetus of Argos to his wife's father, King Iobates of Lycia, much health. I require and charge you, as you value my good will and alliance, that you immediately put to death the messenger who brings you this. Farewell.

Then Iobates was in a great perplexity; being on the one hand desirous to please his powerful son-in-law; and, on the other, not a little afraid of his messenger from the moment he set eyes on him. For Bellerophon was splendid in rich armour of the famed Corinthian bronze; fair of

face and in mien most noble, like the son of a god; and his look betokened him full of valour. And when Iobates saw also the wondrous horse he rode, his mind misgave him that this was perhaps indeed the child of some god, on whom it were ill to lay hands. So he thought best to dissemble with the stranger, until he could devise some plot for his undoing. That day he made a great feast in his house, and set Bellerophon in the place of honour; when they began to carouse, the king pledged him in a golden cup, and gave it to him as a guest-gift. And so he did the second day and the third, only each day the cup he gave was larger and more richly chased.

But by the fourth morn Iobates had found a way. . . . There lived then on the Lycian uplands a fearful earth-born monster, called by the folk *Chimaera*—that is, ‘The She-goat’. For her body was like a she-goat’s—but she had a lion’s head and fore-paws, and a serpent’s tail. And her breath was like the blast of a furnace seven times heated, so that none could come near her and live. Long had she been the terror of the land, preying on flocks and herds, and blighting corn-fields and pastures with her scorching breath. Iobates thought, with some reason, that the simplest and surest way to

destroy Bellerophon was to send him in quest of Chimaera. So with woe-begone countenance he told him of this scourge of the land, saying that as king and father of his people he could know no peace until they were delivered from it—but of that he despaired. And even as he hoped, Bellerophon no sooner heard all this than he was neither to hold nor to bind, but would forthwith set out to encounter the monster. Iobates dissuaded him—but very faintly—and then bade him farewell, trusting that he was going to meet certain death.

But the king reckoned without the good friend and ally that Bellerophon had. Mounted on Pegasus, the young hero soared high in air until he descried Chimaera prowling on the hill-sides; then, swooping downwards, he shot an arrow that pierced her shaggy neck and stretched her dead. Then back he sped to the city with the tidings, and all the folk went out to view the slain monster; great rejoicings made the Lycians that day; but Iobates feared Bellerophon more than ever, and was at his wit's end what to do.

The very next day, as luck would have it, word came to him that the Amazons, those women-warriors, were making a foray on his northern

border, and the wild tribe of the Solymi had risen against him to the eastward. ‘Here is my chance,’ thought the king, and told the news to Bellerophon, pretending great alarm.

‘Do not be cast down, my royal lord,’ said the young man. ‘With the help of the gods I shall make short work of all your enemies. And that will be small payment to so generous a host. Only tell me, whither shall I go first?’

Iobates begged him to go first against the Amazons; for he knew they were terrible in battle, and had great hopes that he would fall by their hands. Away went Bellerophon—and two days afterwards came tidings that he had routed the Amazon host with great slaughter, raining arrows upon them from upper air, and now he was gone against the Solymi.

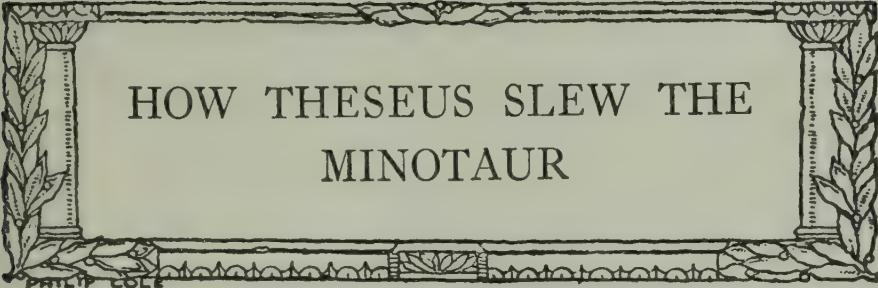
Then Iobates said to himself: ‘Twice hath this youth escaped deadly peril; if he come off safe the third time, I will plot against him no more, lest haply I be found to fight against the gods. Nay, I will give him my daughter to wife, and persuade him to dwell in Lycia, for I need fear no foes with such a champion to defend me’.

And when Bellerophon returned victorious from a great battle with the Solymi, the king did as he had said; and having no son, he left

the kingdom to Bellerophon at his death not long afterwards.

For some years Bellerophon reigned in great prosperity, and three fair sons were born to him. But, alas! his high good fortune so uplifted him that he grew as arrogant and vainglorious as he had once been modest and discreet. At last, in the folly of his heart, he boasted that he would ride Pegasus up to heaven, and enter the eternal mansions of the gods; and forthwith he set out on that impious journey. But Zeus heard him, and sent a gadfly to sting Pegasus as he soared upwards, so that he plunged madly and threw his rider; then the Winged Horse flew straight up into the clouds and vanished from mortal sight for ever. And now he bides happy in the stalls of Zeus, eating heavenly grain from a golden manger.

But Bellerophon fell to earth unhurt—though better for him if he had broken his neck. For he fell on the Aleian Plain, in Cilicia by the sea—a desolate fen where no man came, nor had come since the making of the world. There he wandered till he died, eating his heart, being smitten of Zeus with moody madness. So true is the old saying that pride goeth before destruction.



HOW THESEUS SLEW THE MINOTAUR

Whylom, as olde stories tellen us,
There was a duk that highte Theseus;
Of Athenes he was lord and governour,
And in his tyme swich a conquerour,
That gretter was there noon under the sunne.
Ful many a riche contree had he wonne. . . .
The rede statue of Mars, with spere and targe,
So shyneth in his whyte baner large,
That alle the feeldes gliteren up and down;
And by his baner born is his penoun
Of gold ful riche, in which ther was y-bete
The Minotaur, which that he slough in Crete.

CHAUCER, *The Knights Tale*.

'WONDERS are many,' said Odysseus, when Circe had finished the tale of Bellerophon; 'and I myself have seen strange things enough in my wanderings. But so strange a monster as the Chimaera I have neither seen nor heard of.'

'I could tell you of a stranger one still,' replied Circe, 'and I will do so, if you please, to-morrow night. But now it is high time to go to rest.'

The next night, Odysseus and his comrades

reminded the witch of her promise, and she related the following story:

I

Aegeus, King of Athens, was prosperous in other things, but his grief was that he had no child, though twice married. So, when his second wife died, he went to inquire of the Oracle at Delphi. But the god gave him dark counsel, in these words: 'Touch not the mystic vessel, until thou hast returned to Athens'. Aegeus could make nothing of this; so he resolved to visit his friend and neighbour, King Pittheus of Troezen, who had a great name for wisdom, and ask him to interpret the oracle. Now Pittheus perceived that it signified that Aegeus should not take to wife any woman but an Athenian; but in his subtlety he declared himself unable to interpret it. For he had one fair daughter, named Aethra; and as Troezen was but a petty kingdom, he greatly desired to ally himself by marriage with the rich and powerful King of Athens. 'Though I have no son to reign in my stead,' he thought, 'the sons of my daughter shall rule over both Troezen and Athens.' With this design, he hospitably pressed King

Aegeus to tarry awhile under his roof, trusting that Aethra's beauty would do the rest. And, as he hoped, Aegeus fell so deeply in love with the maiden that nothing would serve him but to marry her then and there. But wise as Pittheus was, he could not read the heart of a girl. Aethra was as much in love as her bridegroom; and on their wedding-night she revealed to him the interpretation of the oracle, which her father had told her, entreating pardon for her share in the deceit.

'Nay, sweetheart,' said Aegeus, 'I love you never the less; you did your part like a dutiful daughter. But vows made through fraud bind no man, nor dare I cross the will of Apollo. So I will away to Athens with the first light; only, now I bethink me, pray come with me a little way out of the town, and there we will say farewell.'

So they two stole out of Troezen at daybreak, and came where a great stone stood by the way-side. There Aegeus halted, and rolling back the stone—for he was as strong as a bull—he scooped a hole with his sword in the ground it had covered, laid the sword and his sandals therein, and rolled back the stone over all. Then said he: 'Fair Aethra, the gods may grant that you shall bear

me a son. If it be so, and he grows to manhood, let him bring my sword and sandals to me for a token, and I will acknowledge him'. So saying, he left her, and went his way to Athens.

II

When her time came, Aethra brought forth a man-child, lusty and fair, and his grandsire named him Theseus. Wherein, as some hold, Pittheus showed a divining mind; for the name means 'He that sets in order', and Theseus lived to set in good order the Athenian commonwealth. The boy was tenderly reared by his mother, and taught all the wisdom of antiquity by his grandfather. When he was eighteen years old, Aethra led her son to the stone where the tokens lay, and told him for the first time the story of his parentage. Easily did young Theseus lift the massy stone; and at his mother's bidding he took the sword and sandals and set out forthwith for Athens, to make himself known to his father. Aethra would fain have had him go by sea, because the landward road was at that time beset at several points by certain notorious robbers; but Theseus, who burned to make proof of his manhood, laughed at her fears; and on his

journey along the coast-road he encountered and killed three of those terrors to travellers. But a greater danger awaited him at Athens.

You have heard, Odysseus, of the great enchantress Medea—mine own kinswoman, for, like myself, she was descended from the Sun-God—and how she revenged herself upon her faithless lover, Jason, who by her aid alone had escaped death and won the Golden Fleece. Now after her deed of vengeance, Medea fled to Athens, where her charm and subtle wit so wrought upon King Aegeus that he shortly married her. By her magic art, she knew at first sight that Theseus was coming; and, feeling all the jealous hate of a stepmother, she resolved to destroy him. So she warned Aegeus that on the eighth day of that month a stranger would enter his house, seeking hospitality, of whom he must beware; for that man was hired to murder him by certain pretenders to the Athenian throne.

Sure enough, on the eighth day a stranger youth appeared; Aegeus welcomed him hospitably after his custom, and gave him the seat of honour at his evening banquet. But he had ready beside him a cup of wine in which Medea had mingled a deadly poison; and this he was

about to hand to his guest, when Theseus, by some divine prompting, unbuckled his sword for greater ease, and laid it on the table. Aegeus no sooner beheld that token than he dashed the cup to the ground, and embraced the youth with tears of joy, acknowledging him for his son and heir. As for Medea, she vanished that moment from the banqueting-hall and was never more seen on earth. The Athenians say she flew away in a chariot drawn by two winged dragons, but whither she went they do not profess to know.

III

All went merrily at Athens during the weeks of late summer that followed the coming of Theseus. The old king grew daily fonder of his new-found heir, and never wearied of giving feasts to the citizens in his honour. Yet before these halcyon days ended, Theseus grew aware that some hidden grief or dread oppressed the Athenians. To all his inquiries, they would only answer, with a shudder, that *the time was at hand for paying the Cretan tribute*. Theseus then questioned his father, who at first desired him to hold his peace and not pry into matters which did not concern him; but when he saw the

youth resolute to be informed either by himself or by others, he spoke thus:

'You probably know, my son, that the great island of Crete is ruled by the most powerful of monarchs, whose name is Minos, and whose father—though a mortal mother bore him—is none other than the king of gods and men. I had not long occupied my throne when the son of Minos, Androgeos by name, came to compete in the athletic games I had newly founded. easily, I confess, he overcame our best athletes; but this I solemnly affirm—it was without my consent or knowledge that he was waylaid and murdered by certain jealous rivals on his journey hence to the Isthmian Games, where doubtless fresh triumphs awaited him. Yet nothing would convince King Minos of my innocence. He declared war upon me, and forthwith set sail for our coast with all his navy. But by mistake, he laid siege to our neighbour-city, Megara. There he achieved a most inglorious conquest; for finding means to come at the king's daughter, and making pretence of love, he persuaded the wretched girl to betray her father and her country. (She, you must know, was called Scylla; her father's name was Nisus.) Now, by divine dispensation, Nisus had on his head a

lock unlike the rest of his hair, for it was purple; this lock was enchanted, and, so long as he wore it, Nisus could never be conquered in war. No one but Nisus himself knew the virtue of the lock, except his daughter, whom he dearly loved, and trusted with the secret. And Scylla, thinking to win her lover's heart, first told Minos the secret; and then, at his bidding, cut off the lock while Nisus slept, and fled with it to the Cretan ships. Truly, she reaped her just reward; for Minos no sooner saw what she had brought him than he had her bound to an anchor, and flung, shrieking, over his galley's side. That same day he carried Megara by storm, and slew Nisus with his own hand. Our turn came next—we were in no case to resist, for the gods had visited us that year with dearth and pestilence. What could we do but accept the terms Minos offered as by mouth of herald—namely, that he would spare Athens if we swore to pay him a tribute of seven youths and seven maidens every ninth year? We did accept—and to-morrow, alas! the tribute falls due, and a Cretan warship will be here to receive it. The lots will be drawn at daybreak, in Athena's temple. A register is kept there of the youth of both sexes between the ages of fifteen and twenty, and the name of each inscribed on a

tablet; these tablets will be placed in two urns, one for either sex, and Athena's priestess will draw seven names from each urn. You may now understand, my son, why the natural gaiety of our folk is so dismally eclipsed; rich or poor, high or low, every man is haunted by the fear that his own son or daughter may be one of the *Cretan captives*, whose dreadful fate they too well know.'

'Why, does Minos make slaves of them?' asked Theseus indignantly.

'Worse, far worse than that,' replied his father, shuddering. 'Those hapless ones are given as prey to a strange and fearful creature called the Minotaur, whose food is human flesh. This portent has the body of a man, but the head and hoofs of a bull, and has his lair in a dungeon within the royal palace. 'Tis said he is the offspring of Minos' queen, Pasiphaë, whom for some great sin the gods caused to give birth to a monster; wherefore Minos durst not destroy the prodigy, from superstitious awe, but concealed him from the light of day. . . . You look pale, my Theseus, and no wonder; but fear not —being so newly come, your name is not yet enrolled upon our register, so your lot will not be cast with the others.'

But the old king little knew his son's mettle. When the lots were about to be drawn for the youths, Theseus stepped forward in sight of all, and bade the priestess draw six lots only from the urn; for he, as the king's son, had the right to share the dangers of his folk, and claimed a place among the doomed seven. The people broke forth into tears and blessings, but the king was almost distraught with grief. But in vain he pleaded with Theseus to give up his rash resolve. He comforted the old man as best he could, bidding him take heart and remember how Jason and brave Perseus, while still young as he, had come safe through even greater perils than this, by divine aid. 'I, too,' he said, 'will put my trust in the gods, and by their help I shall destroy the monster and rid Athens of this hateful tribute. But if I fail, I cannot die in a nobler cause.'

That same day, the war-galley sent by King Minos appeared in the harbour of Athens; and the seven youths and seven maidens embarked and sailed away amid the weeping and lamentation of the whole city.

IV

When the Athenian captives arrived at the royal city of Cnossus, they were brought to a

palace vast and splendid beyond anything they could have imagined, where Minos received them like welcome guests and entertained them sumptuously for nine days. The rest began to think the dreadful tale about the Minotaur was a fable, and they were in gay spirits. But Theseus saw the king's cold, gleaming eyes watching them at the feast, and a cruel smile on his dark face; and he guessed with a thrill of horror that this soft living and high feeding was meant to make them better food for the monster. So he kept on his guard, although Minos treated the young prince with special honour, making him sit every day at his own table, where his eldest daughter served them as cup-bearer, after the Cretan custom.

Now the Princess Ariadne—that was the maiden's name—no sooner set eyes on the handsome young Athenian than pity filled her heart to think he must so shortly die a hideous death. That is to say, she thought at first it was pity, but before they had met many times she knew that it was love. Then she resolved to save him.

The first thing was to get speech with him alone; and this was not very difficult, though the palace was a nest of spies. For, as the princess

knew, her father cared nothing how much she saw of his captive, though as a rule she was strictly guarded. He even told her to make much of the pretty lad and keep him in a good humour. ‘You may be as kind as you choose,’ he added, smiling grimly, ‘for dead men tell no tales.’ So on the eighth morning Theseus was summoned by a slave to join the princess in her own garden of roses. And there, with downcast eyes and bated breath, Ariadne told her love, modestly yet proudly, as became her royalty—and that she had devised means to save him from imminent death. ‘For to-morrow,’ she said, ‘my father gives the Minotaur its first victim—and that victim will be *you*. Theseus, if you die, I will die too. But do as I bid you, and you shall slay the monster and escape to Athens with your comrades—and with *me*, unless you would leave me to endure my father’s vengeance.’

What could Theseus do but thank her with his whole heart, and vow that if indeed her plan succeeded he would take her to Athens as his bride? Grateful he was, and well might be; and if he did not love the fair Cretan, who shall blame him for not feeling bound to tell her so at such a moment? I think he did not love

her; her dark beauty was too strange, too barbaric to please Greek eyes; and he could not forget she came of evil race—child of Minos and of that Queen Pasiphaë whose nameless sin had brought a judgment upon her. Yet when he vowed that vow, he honestly meant to keep it. . . .

V

The lair of the Minotaur was in the inmost recesses of a vast underground building called *Labyrinth* in the Cretan tongue. It had been built for King Minos by the famous artificer Daedalus, on purpose to keep the monster and his cannibal orgies concealed from human eyes. Daedalus therefore built a maze of winding, vaulted passages, so artfully contrived that whoever entered came before he was aware to the central den, and if he then fled ere the Minotaur could seize him, he wandered hopelessly lost till he came to the den once more—but never could he find the entrance to the maze.

Now Minos believed that the secret of the Labyrinth was known only to himself and Daedalus; for when it was finished he had shut up there the luckless masons who built it, to be devoured by its awful inmate. And he only

spared Daedalus the like fate in order to use his peerless skill on other works. So he gave Daedalus a lodging and workshop in the palace, paid him magnificently, and lavished favours upon him. And the Princess Ariadne, then a child, loved nothing better than to visit the workshop, and watch the great craftsman either carving a statue in cypress-wood, or painting in enamel, or making some rare piece of goldsmith's work—for of all these arts he was master. Daedalus, I must tell you, was no Cretan, but an Athenian, who had fled his country and sought the powerful protection of King Minos because he had slain a fellow-citizen by mischance. The lonely exile's heart warmed to the beautiful little princess; he soon loved her like a daughter of his own, and as she grew older, confided to her all his dealings with her father.

Thus Ariadne knew all about the Labyrinth, and that Theseus must wander therein till he perished of hunger, even if by valour and good fortune he should slay the Minotaur. Hopeless seemed that adventure—but what is too hard for a woman's wit, when love has sharpened it?

By tears and prayers, Ariadne so wrought upon Daedalus—who, besides, had kept a kindness towards his fellow-countrymen—that he gave her

the means to save Theseus. ‘Give your lover,’ said he, ‘this ball of linen thread; bid him fasten one end of it to the door-post of the Labyrinth, and carry the ball with him, letting it unwind as he goes onward; by this clue, if the gods grant him to overcome the monster, he will find his way back through the maze. But even when free of the Labyrinth, how will he escape from Minos?’

‘I have provided for that,’ said Ariadne. And so she had. . . .

King Minos was bland as ever when the next morning he thus accosted Theseus: ‘Princely son of Aegeus, I hear that strange tales are rife among the Athenians concerning the fate of their children who come as hostages to Crete. Now you yourself are witness that they suffer no ill usage at my hands, and the rumour is false that says they are thrown into the den of a man-eating monster. But true it is that by divine dispensation such a monster hath his dwelling beneath my palace—and if you, gallant prince, can rid me of that pest by slaying him in his lair, I will remit for ever the tribute Athens owes me’.

‘I take the challenge, king,’ said Theseus eagerly; ‘only swear to me by most high Zeus, whom we both adore, to keep your promise.’

Minos took that oath, nothing doubting; and straightway led the young Athenian to the Labyrinth. . . . As the heavy iron door shut with a clang, the stern, black-bearded king turned away, smiling grimly. ‘There goes a dainty morsel,’ he muttered, ‘for Pasiphaë’s child.’

VI

It was by his own valour, and his skill as a swordsman, that Theseus met the onrush of the Minotaur, and laid that monster dead at his feet. But his escape, not only from the Labyrinth, but from Crete, he owed to Ariadne. Besides the clue of thread, she had given him a cluster of dates and a small flask of wine, which he carried under his cloak, so that he might wait without faintness in the Labyrinth until midnight, for nowhere else would he be so safe. And at midnight, while all slept, she guided him and his thirteen companions to the harbour, where she had a little ship waiting, well manned and provisioned. With muffled oars the sailors rowed her out of harbour, then hoisted sail and away northward with a favouring breeze.

At dawn they sighted the fair isle of Naxos,

and put in there for fresh water—the one thing that had been forgotten in the haste of their departure. Ariadne, seeing a clear stream running down to the sea, must needs go ashore to bathe and refresh herself, while the water-casks were being filled. She went along the wooded banks, out of sight of the others, and having bathed in a pool of the stream, sat down to rest a little while. But being drowsy after a night of watching, sleep overtook her unawares. . . .

When Ariadne woke, she knew that she must have been asleep several hours, for the sun was high overhead. Surprised that no one had come to look for her, she hastened back to the shore. There was no one there—and no ship in the bay! Thunderstruck, hardly trusting her eyes, Ariadne remained staring at the spot where it had been, as if she thought the waves had closed over it by some enchantment, and it would suddenly reappear. The cry of a gull swooping past roused her; she looked up—looked seaward . . . and saw the ship, already far out, heading westward under full sail. Already too far to hear her piercing cries—soon too far to see the glittering veil that she tore off and wildly signalled with as she rushed to a headland near . . . but in her frenzy of despair she still waved, and

shrieked, and cried out: ‘Theseus! Theseus! O cruel, O traitor, come back!’ long after the dark Cretan sails had passed out of her ken. Worn out at last, she flung herself prone on the ground and prayed to die. But the gods, who willed otherwise, cast a merciful slumber over her. . . .

Here Circe broke off her story, for it was growing late, promising to tell the rest on the morrow.

VII

‘Was it wilfully, or by some strange mischance,’ asked Odysseus, the next night, ‘that Theseus deserted Ariadne in Naxos?’

‘That,’ replied Circe, with her enigmatic smile, ‘is a disputed question. Some of the Athenians, willing to acquit their hero of ingratitude, declare that he believed she had returned on board and was among the Athenian maidens, when he sailed away from the island, and that a strong gale prevented his putting back when he found out his mistake. But there was nothing to prevent his sending a ship for her after he got safe home to Athens—which he never did. Others, again, say that he was moved to abandon her at that very place and time by heaven-sent prompting.

'Why do you smile, Circe?' said Odysseus gravely. 'Many men are visited by these divine intimations—I have felt them myself in moments of danger—and only impious men disregard them. Who can say that Theseus did not act on one?'

'No one, my friend,' replied Circe, shrugging her white shoulders, 'except perhaps—Theseus himself. And he is dead, you know. But, to deal frankly with you, I think he *did* act on a sudden impulse—only, it came from his own heart. Remember who and what Ariadne was—an alien, child of an evil mother, and of his country's detested foe. How would the Athenians take his bringing the daughter of Minos home with him as their future queen? Above all, he did not love her . . . was even a little repelled by her passion for him—perhaps felt that she could hate as fiercely as she loved. . . . Yet marry her he must; for he could see it would be safer for him to enrage a tigress than such a woman. And then—so it seems to me—as he watched her disappear into the Naxian woods, he suddenly saw a way out of his trouble . . . if only she did not come back too quickly. As luck would have it, Ariadne gave him plenty of time to get clear away.'

'Did the Cretan crew make no trouble about leaving their princess behind?' asked Elpenor.

'If they did,' answered Circe, 'Theseus and the Athenian lads soon brought them to reason. They were only slaves, you see, and unarmed. But now for the end of my story. . . .'

Theseus had promised his father that if he returned alive, he would hoist a white sail as his ship neared Athens; and day after day old Aegeus sat on a hill above the harbour, watching anxiously for that signal. At last, a ship of the Cretan build and scarlet colour hove in sight, and as she drew nearer a great shout went up from the folk on the quays, for they could see a company in Athenian garb standing at the prow. 'The children! Joy, joy, it is our children!' was the cry, and the sound of it brought all Athens, men and women, rushing to the harbour. But the old king gave but one look at the ship's sails, and sank back in his chair, death-pale and trembling. 'Black!' he gasped out. 'Black sails . . . my Theseus is dead!' And with that word, his spirit fled from earth.

Now black the sails were, for such is the Cretan fashion, and Theseus had forgotten his promise to display a white one. Thus was the bitterness

of grief and self-reproach mingled with the gladness of his home-coming.

But not even sorrow for their good old king's sad end could overcloud the rapturous joy of the Athenians that day. The whole city rang with the sounds of feasting and revelry, with hymns of praise to the gods and songs in honour of Theseus; every altar blazed with sacrifice, every house was decked with garlands, and its door set hospitably open that whoever would might come in and share with its inmates the best fare they could provide. Men, women, and children, all in their best attire, thronged the streets, talking, laughing, and exchanging glad greetings not only with friends but with strangers.

And ever since then, the Athenians have kept that day of the year as a day of high festival after the same manner, in remembrance of the great deliverance that Theseus wrought for them by slaying the Cretan Minotaur.

So ended the first great adventure of Theseus. Many others befell him afterwards, and by valour and good fortune he came safe through all perils, and reigned prosperously over Athens for many years. For all that, he did not, in the end, escape punishment for breaking faith with Ariadne—and that punishment, by the strange

workings of Fate, came through his taking another Cretan bride. But that story I will tell you some other time. . . .

As for Ariadne, because she had dared so greatly for love's sake, the gods would not suffer her to pine and perish broken-hearted, but made her happy for ever, in wondrous wise.

In those days there was no city in Naxos, and none dwelt there but a few fisher-folk, living in huts scattered along the shores. The rest of the isle was solitary woodland, beautiful with groves of stately trees and with sunny glades where the wild vines' clusters ripened unseen. Now Bacchus, God of the Vine, loved to visit Naxos in the time of grape-harvest; and that time was come when Theseus put in at the isle. . . .

Ariadne was roused from sleep by a merry din of voices, laughter, and clashing cymbals from the neighbouring wood. She rose up, bewildered, and but half awake. 'Where am I?' she murmured—then remembering all, and careless what might now betide her, she turned her back on the wood and gazed seaward with yearning eyes.

Standing there, rapt in her grief, she neither saw nor heard the joyous band that came dancing out of the shade of the forest. Wood-nymphs tripping hand in hand, shaggy satyrs capering

uncouthly—and after them a car drawn by two sleek leopards, whereon stood a youth beautiful exceedingly, with an ivy-wreath on his long, dark curls and a fawn-skin floating from his white shoulders. A half-t tipsy old man, also garlanded with ivy, rode on an ass behind him.

Beholding Ariadne, the whole company halted, amazed. Strange sight indeed, in that desert place, was a lovely lady richly dressed as any queen, and crowned with a coronal of sparkling gems. But Bacchus saw only the face which, at his train's startled cry, she turned toward him. One look—and the young god flung himself from the car and bounded to her side. . . .

Short is ever the wooing, when an Olympian sets his heart on one of the daughters of men. That same day saw the forsaken of Theseus, the friendless castaway, made the blissful bride of a god. And now Ariadne dwells with him for ever in the golden court of heaven; for at the prayer of Bacchus, his father Zeus bestowed immortality and immortal youth upon her. And to honour the wife of his belovèd son, Zeus changed the jewelled coronal she wore as a Cretan princess into the glittering constellation that men still call *Ariadne's Crown*.

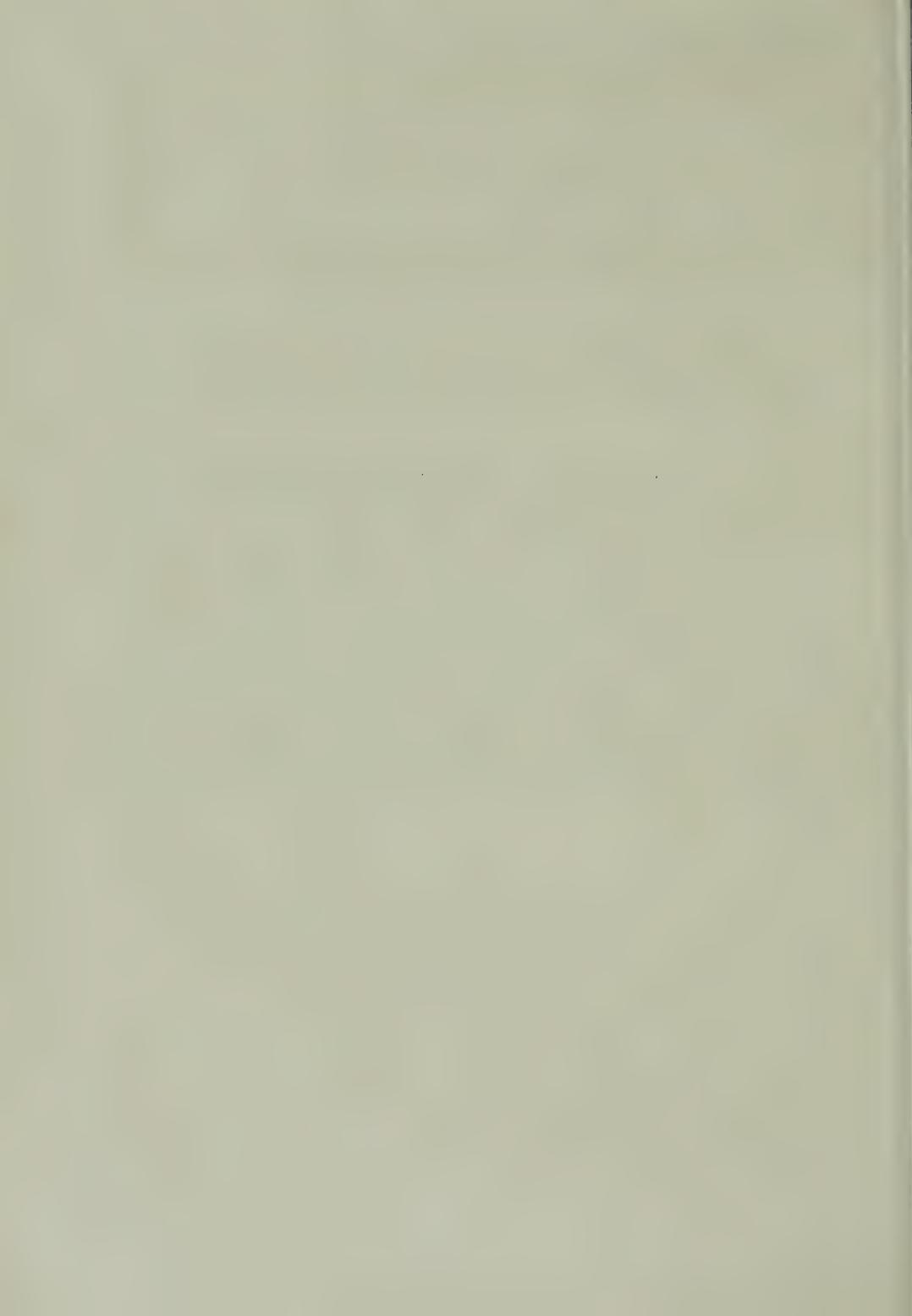
VIII

'Truly, Ariadne had her reward,' said Odysseus as Circe paused; 'and I wish all your stories ended as happily as this one. But I should like to know what became of Daedalus; for without his help she could never have got Theseus out of the Labyrinth, and moreover he was evidently a marvellous craftsman.'

'Ah!' said Circe. 'Daedalus was less fortunate than those other two. He knew that when their flight was discovered Minos would guess that he had betrayed the secret of the Labyrinth, and that he too must flee from Crete, to escape the king's vengeance. And he must take with him his young son, Icarus by name. As you say, Odysseus, Daedalus was a marvellous craftsman. So he made four great wings, larger and stronger than an eagle's; and with melted wax he fastened one pair to his own shoulders and the other pair on his son's. "Now we will fly across the sea," he said; "but beware, Icarus, of flying too high, lest the sun's heat melt the wax again." Then forthwith they rose in the air, and flew away westward. Daedalus had resolved to make for the island of Sicily, and there he landed in due

course, by help of a fair wind. But Icarus, being young and foolhardy, and delighted with this new power of flight, soared higher and ever higher as they went, disregarding his father's warning. At last he flew so high that the noonday sun melted the wax, and his wings dropped off. So he fell into the sea and was drowned. And that part of the Midland Sea is called the *Icarian Sea* to this day.

'Now when Minos heard that Daedalus had taken refuge in a city of Sicily, he went there with a great fleet, and when the citizens would not give him up, laid siege to the place. But the citizens made a brave defence, killing many of the besiegers; and at last Minos himself was slain by an arrow from the walls. As for Daedalus, he died not long after of grief for his son's loss, and was honourably buried in that city.'



THE LAND OF SHADOWS

For who, to dumb Forgetfulness a prey,
This pleasing, anxious being e'er resigned,
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
Nor cast one longing, ling'ring look behind?

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of pow'r,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Await alike th' inevitable hour:
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

Elegy in a Country Churchyard.

I

A WHOLE year slipped by, and still Odysseus and his comrades were the guests of the Island Witch. By this time they were all exceeding weary of their sojourn; the pleasures of her palace had grown flat and stale, as such pleasures will; and they longed more and more to see their homes again. Odysseus was the most home-sick of them all, and the only one who had never for a day forgotten Ithaca. But he had waited patiently, after his nature, hoping that Circe would grow tired of him at last and give him leave to go; for he soon saw there was no escaping

from the island without her knowledge and consent. Circe, however, seemed as fond of his company as ever; and as the more he saw of her strange powers the more he feared her, he still held his peace.

But at the twelvemonth's end the crew were neither to hold nor to bind. Having taken Odysseus into the woods as if to hunt, they told him that they were ready to risk the worst that might befall, sooner than stop another day on the island. And they besought him with tears to take them away and try to sail home once more, since they would rather brave any death by sea or land than eat out their hearts in exile. And Odysseus, finding the men were desperate, said: 'Comrades, what I can do, I will. Believe me, we can never leave this place alive unless the witch chooses. But I swear to you I will not sleep to-night before I have spoken to her, and the gods grant I may persuade her to let us go. So be you patient till to-morrow'.

That night, when they were alone together, Odysseus did speak to Circe; and as he pleaded with her, and told how longing for home and wife and child was consuming him and his comrades, his own tears fell fast. The witch heard him out with an inscrutable countenance;

then she said: ‘What needs this, my friend? Think you I have any desire to keep you in my halls as an unwilling guest? Nay, you are free to go whenever it pleases you, and I myself will do my best to speed you on your voyage. Only . . . it is best you should go quickly . . . lest my mood should change’, she added, looking at him strangely. Odysseus feared that too, and hastily said: ‘With your leave, O mighty and gracious one, we will set sail at daybreak’.

‘So be it,’ she answered; ‘but meanwhile sit beside me here; for ere we sleep I must tell you what yet remains for you to do before you can win home.’

‘Only tell me, kind Circe, how to shape a straight course for Ithaca! ’

‘You may not do that, Odysseus . . . not yet. You have another voyage to make first, far into the west, ere you steer for your own land. Nay, do not groan and wring your hands, for so it is willed on high. Be calm, and listen. . . . When blind Teiresias, the great Theban seer, who lived three lives of mortal men, at last passed to the realm of Hades, Queen Persephone granted that his spirit, alone of all the dead, should keep the powers it had in the body. He only, I say, has consciousness, thought, memory; all the other

dead are but shadowy phantoms, ever flitting aimlessly as in a dream. Now by the will of the gods, Teiresias will direct you on your voyage homeward, and prophesy all that is to befall you hereafter.'

But when Odysseus heard that he must visit the Land of the Dead, his blood ran cold for very terror; he rocked himself to and fro in an agony of weeping, and bewailed the day that he was born. And presently: 'O Circe, cruel Circe,' he exclaimed, 'why bid me the impossible? Where can I find a pilot to that bourne, whither no ship has ever sailed?'

'Do not let that fret you,' she replied, 'for you will need none. You have only to unfurl your sails to the wind which I am going to give you, and let the ship drive before it; when it fails, you will see just ahead a low shore, edged with black poplars and weeping willows — there is your landing-place. . . . Nay, now, my friend, I cannot see you give way to weakness. Come, be yourself, brave seaman! Remember all you have dared and done when your only help was in your own wit and courage, and do not despair now, when you have at least one helper . . . who is not without some power.'

Then Odysseus calmed himself; and when he

had heard the rest of the witch's bidding, they went to sleep.

II

But Odysseus slept little that night; and at peep of dawn he stole out of Circe's chamber, and went softly through the house, and awaking his comrades bade them follow him quickly. For still he had misgivings that her mood, as she had said, might change. And the crew, overjoyed, made haste down to the shore, and the cave where they had laid up the ship. But for all their speed, the witch had been there before them, and returned again to her house—nay, she passed them as she returned, though they saw her not, for she walks invisible when she pleases. And behold, the ship lay on the beach ready for launching, and a black ram and a black ewe were tethered to her side. The men cried out for wonder; then one said: 'But what do we want with these two sheep? We can neither kill nor cook them on board'.

'They are for sacrifice,' answered Odysseus, 'at the place whither we go.'

And thereupon he told the crew whither they were bound, and all Circe's bidding. Bitterly

they wept, and loudly they protested that it were better for them to die at once than go on that voyage; yet seeing there was no help for it, and being in great fear of the witch's anger, they presently launched the ship and hoisted sail. And the wind she had promised drove them swiftly westward, till they passed through the gates of the Midland Sea and out into the great ocean-stream that girdles the round world.

After the sun had set, they came to a land whereon he never shines, but fog and mist cover it from year's end to year's end, and its folk, who are called the Cimmerians, live in perpetual gloom. As the ship drew near that darksome coast, the wind fell suddenly; and Odysseus saw the place Circe had told him of, the willows dry and sere and the poplar-grove. There he landed, and made two of his comrades bring the black ram and ewe ashore, and set about the rites that she had bidden him perform.

First, going a little way into the poplar grove, he dug with his sword a shallow pit in the earth, a cubit square; and into this he poured a three-fold drink-offering to the Dead—firstly milk and honey, next wine, lastly pure water. Then with his sword he cut the throats of the two sheep, holding them close to the pit so that their blood

flowed into it. Instantly there came a mingled sound like the rustling of leaves and the sighing of wind and the twittering of birds, and ghostly forms were seen thronging near—forms of maidens, and old men, and warriors in bloodstained armour, and many others. At that, the hair of Odysseus and the two men with him rose on their heads and their teeth chattered for fear; but he mastered himself, and said: ‘Quick, comrades, take the carcases of the sheep and go back to the beach. Make a fire there, and burn them, and pray the Gods of the Dead to accept the sacrifice’. And the two made haste to obey.

Now Circe had told him that the ghosts would come flocking to drink out of the pit—for they are athirst for life, and a draught of warm blood puts life into them a little while—but that he must keep them off with his sword and not suffer any to drink until Teiresias had come and taken his share. So there he stood on guard, waving the gleaming blade this way and that way; and the ghosts drew back, gibbering—for they cannot endure to look on iron or steel. Then suddenly stepped forth one who seemed no phantom but alive; Odysseus knew him, and cried: ‘Elpenor! In the name of wonder, how came you hither, faster than our ship has sailed? In the hurry

of departing, no one missed you from amongst us until we had put to sea. But doubtless here is some witch-work of Circe's'.

'Not so, Odysseus,' answered Elpenor in faint, hollow tones—and even as he spoke, the hues of life began to fade from his visage, and his form to grow shadowy like those others. 'Not so,' he said again. 'I am come to this Land of the Dead because—I am one of them. I died but a few moments after you left the house of the witch. Nay, start not, Odysseus—'twas by no violence or treachery, but my own heedlessness. . . . Last night, being heated with wine, I went up to the palace-roof, to sleep there in the cool. I woke suddenly, before it was yet daylight, and heard your voices and footsteps going away. And I leapt up to follow—but forgetting where I was, nor seeing in the dimness the trapdoor and the ladder by which I had gone up, I fell headlong from the roof and broke my neck. . . . But, O my captain, I conjure you, as ever you hope to see home and loved ones again, forget me not when you return to Circe's isle—for return you will, I know. Let me not lie there unburied, unwept for; but burn me and mine arms on a funeral pyre, with dirges due. Then heap a mound over my bones, by the seashore,

and set up my oar thereon—the oar I toiled at so long among my comrades—that mariners passing by may know 'tis a sailor's tomb and pity him his death far from home.'

'All this shall be done as you wish, hapless one,' said Odysseus, much moved. Then Elpenor departed, nor looked behind him as he went.

And now among the hovering faces near Odysseus saw that of his mother, whom he had left alive when he sailed for Troy. Sorely he wept at that sight; much he longed to let her come near, but dared not lower the sword till Teiresias should come. Immediately after, a tall, majestic old man drew near, for whom the other souls made way with reverent looks. He held a golden sceptre in his hand; and by his white chaplet and seer's mantle Odysseus knew this was Teiresias at last.

Son of Laertes,' said the seer, 'why hast thou quitted the light of day and come unto this realm of the Dead, where no joy is? If it be to hear soothsay of me, stand away from the pit that I may drink of the blood. And put up thy sword into the scabbard.'

Then Odysseus sheathed the sword, and Teiresias stooped down and drank. But the other souls held aloof, reverencing the great

seer. He, when he had drunk, began to speak thus:

'Thou art come to inquire of me, Odysseus, concerning thy home-coming, whether it shall be accomplished. Know, then, that much toil and many perils are yet in store for thee. For thou hast a mighty adversary, even Poseidon; yea, hot and quenchless is his wrath against thee for the blinding of the Cyclops, his son. Therefore he has vexed thee with all his storms, and wert thou not protected by others among the Immortals, he had wrecked thy ship ere now. As long as thou sailest the seas, he will be ever on the watch to do thee a mischief. Yet for all this thou mayest come safe home if thou heed the warning I now give thee. . . . Thou comest from Circe's isle—ay, 'twas that powerful enchantress, daughter of the Sun-god, who sent thee unto me, and to her thou must return. Fear nothing—she will let thee go as soon as she has given thee good store of all things needful for thy homeward voyage. Also, she will tell thee what course to steer, and of three strange perils that await thee thereon, and how to escape them. But now mark heedfully what I shall say. . . . Those perils past, thou wilt come to the island called Trinacria, where there are seven herds of kine

and seven flocks of sheep that belong to Helios the Sun-god. If thou and thy comrades lay no hand on these, then shall ye all return safe to Ithaca. But if not, all that have shared in that sacrilege shall perish at sea. And if thou thyself escape that doom, yet shall thy home-coming be long delayed and very grievous unto thee. For thou wilt return alone, in a ship borrowed from strangers, having lost thine own vessel and all thy comrades; and thou shalt find sore trouble at home—even men of violence lording it in thy house, wooing thy wife and devouring thy substance.'

At these words, Odysseus laid his hand on his sword-hilt, and his grey eyes kindled.

'And shall I not take swift vengeance on those men,' he asked, 'and set my house in order?'

'Ay,' said Teiresias, 'that thou wilt do, whether by craft or in open fight. But soon thou wilt weary of dwelling idle in thy petty kingdom—soon the lust of wandering and adventure will possess thee again. Then, O sailor, take thine oar upon thy shoulder and fare forth. Travel on and on, till thou come to a country so far inland that its folk know nothing of the sea, nor of ships, nor of oars, that are as it were the wings whereby ships fly, neither have ever tasted salt, the fruit

of the sea. And this shall be a clear sign to thee that thou art come to thy goal—another wayfarer shall meet thee on the road, and beholding the oar thou bearest on thy shoulder, shall say: “This is some new sort of winnowing-fan”. Then plant thine oar in the ground, and do sacrifice to Poseidon, for then will he be reconciled. After that, return thou home again, and offer a sacrifice of a hundred oxen to all the gods. But know, lastly, that death shall come to thee at last in gentle wise, and not upon the sea; thou wilt die in a green old age, with thy folk dwelling peaceably about thee.”

Thus the Theban seer ended his prophecy. Then said Odysseus: ‘So be it, Teiresias, for all these things the gods have ordained as it seemed good to them. But now tell me one thing more, I pray you. Yonder I see the spirit of my dead mother; look, there she sits nearest, gazing on the pool of blood, but me she neither regards nor speaks to. What can I do to make her recognize her son?’

Teiresias answered: ‘Those spirits only can hold speech with thee whom thou shalt suffer to drink of the blood’; and with that he departed to his own place.

Then Odysseus beckoned with his hand to the

spirit of Anticleia, his mother; and she glided to the pit, and drank. And straightway she knew him, and cried out: ‘O my son, what do you here, in the kingdom of Hades? For I see well that you are a living man. Troy fell long since, I know—have you not yet been home?’

Odysseus made answer: ‘Mother mine, I came hither to seek guidance from Teiresias of Thebes, and not yet have I revisited my home. Of a truth, sorrow and trouble have been my portion since first I went with King Agamemnon to Troyland. But I left you there alive and hale—tell me, dear mother, how you died. Was it some wasting sickness, or a sudden shaft of Artemis, the destroyer of so many women, that laid you low? And my father, and my young son—do they live and prosper, possessing what was mine, or have others despoiled them of it? And Penelope my wife—is she true to me all this while, or has she given me up for lost and wedded some princely suitor?’

Then said Anticleia: ‘My son, Penelope is a faithful wife, and sits weeping for you day and night. And Telemachus your son holds his due place both in your house and in all assemblies of the folk, with whom he is in high favour. But your father, worn out by age and sorrows,

has withdrawn from the city to a poor hut on an outlying farm of yours, and lives there in the humblest fashion, evermore mourning for his lost son. As for me, 'twas neither slow disease nor the swift arrows of Artemis that killed me. No, I died of sheer longing for you, child of my heart; so sorely did I miss your loving ways, and wise counsel in all household troubles'.

Then fain would Odysseus have embraced and kissed his dear mother. Thrice he sprang forward with outstretched arms—and thrice his arms closed upon empty air. 'How is this, my mother?' he cried despairingly. 'Nay, sure, you are *not* my mother—but a phantom that Persephone, Queen of the Dead, has sent me in her likeness.'

But the soul of Anticleia answered: 'Thus it is with us who are dead, my son. We have no longer flesh and bones that may be grasped, for those have been consumed by the funeral fire. That which survives those flames is but the shadowy counterfeit of our living selves. Even such am I now, dear son. And so farewell—but if you will heed your mother's bidding, return as soon as may be to the light of day, and when you come home, tell all that you have seen and heard to your wife'.

III

Before Odysseus could answer, the soul of his mother vanished from his sight. Then, by the sending of Queen Persephone, there came to him the souls of women famed for their beauty in ancient times. He suffered them to come near, one by one, and drink of the blood; and each, when she had drunk, told him her name and story. Thus he saw Alcmena, who bore Heracles to Zeus; and Leda, fairest of all women saving her daughter Helen, and mother also of the great twin brethren Castor and Pollux. Next came the beauteous Iphimedia, whom Poseidon loved; she too was the mother of twin sons, Otus and Ephialtes. Those two even in childhood grew taller and more huge than any mortal man; for at nine years old their height was four-and-fifty feet, and their breadth fifteen. Then in the pride of their giant strength, they boasted that they would root up lofty Mount Pelion, and set it on the top of Mount Ossa, and so climb up to the House of Zeus in heaven. But ere that could be, or the down had grown upon their cheeks, Phoebus Apollo slew them both with his keen arrows. . . . Many other renowned fair

ones did Odysseus behold, of whom time fails me to tell. Last of all came Eriphyle, the lovely and false-hearted, who sold her husband's life for gold.

When all these had come and gone—and by Queen Persephone's command they vanished swiftly as they came—there drew near a stately form, robed and sceptred like a king. And Odysseus saw it was the soul of King Agamemnon. The spirit groaned aloud as it came—even such a groan had the dying king thrice uttered under the blows of his murderer. . . . But Odysseus, who had last seen him homeward bound with the spoils of Troy, knew nothing of his death; and deeply it grieved him, for he had been Agamemnon's most trusted friend and counsellor throughout the long war.

As soon as the soul of Agamemnon had drunk of the blood, it knew Odysseus, and stretched out its arms to embrace him—but in vain, for it was but a shadow without substance. Struck with pity, Odysseus cried: ‘Alas, King Agamemnon, once mightiest of all the kings of the earth, is it thus with you now? Tell me, I pray you, how you died. Did Poseidon raise a tempest and wreck your ships on your passage home—or were you killed in some war or foray you made afterwards?’

'I perished neither in shipwreck nor battle,' answered Agamemnon, 'but by the treachery of my accursèd wife. Long had she been false to me with Aegisthus my kinsman, and for love of him she foully murdered me on the very day of my home-coming. Verily, there is nothing on earth so terrible and shameless as a woman. For, ah, how Clytemnestra welcomed me—with fond looks and honeyed speeches, praising my prowess to the skies and forcing on me honours only fit for the gods! Never did wife seem more overjoyed to see her lord come home in triumph. But 'twas all feigning—all part of her plot to destroy me. And I, suspecting nothing, let her unarm me and cover me with a great scarlet robe and lead me to the warm bath prepared for my refreshment. . . . Then, Odysseus, as I lay in the bath, my wife suddenly threw the heavy robe right over me; and before I could free head or limbs, she struck me three mortal blows with an axe. Ay, that was my death—slaughtered as men slay an ox for the sacrifice! Surely this deed of Clytemnestra's shall be a reproach to all women for evermore, even to the good among them.'

Odysseus shuddered, and said: 'Truly, Zeus must have ordained that the daughters of

Tyndareus should be ministers of Doom on earth. For the one you wedded has destroyed her own husband; and for her sister Helen's sake thousands of brave men have been slain in battle'.

Then said Agamemnon: 'Take warning from me, Odysseus, not to be over gentle with any woman, and never to let any know your whole heart and mind. Not that you need fear harm from your wife, for Penelope, I know, is good and wise. But yet—mark well the counsel I now give you. *When you go home at last, do not return openly, but in secret.* Remember this, I say; for henceforth no man may wholly trust a woman.'

'But now tell me—have you heard any tidings of my son Orestes, whether he lives, and how he fares? Ah, how I longed to see my boy again—he was but an infant when I left him—but even that my cruel wife denied me. When I asked where he was, she said she had sent him away to the care of good friends, because there had been tumults and threats of rebellion in the city. Surely he is yet alive—know you aught of him, my friend?'

Odysseus answered: 'Do not ask me concerning Orestes, king; for I know not whether he is alive

or dead, and to speak to no purpose was never my way'.

Then with a heavy sigh the soul of Agamemnon turned and departed.

Looking after him as he went, Odysseus saw that beyond the dusky grove lay a vast meadow, covered with flowering asphodel, where troops of souls were roaming in a pale light like misty moonshine. And as one troop came swiftly towards him, he saw the familiar faces of heroes who had fought and died at Troy. Achilles was there with Patroclus at his side; and old Nestor's brave son Antilochus, who laid down his life for his father; and Ajax, the strongest man of all the Greek host after the son of Peleus.

Achilles led the band, and wherever he walked all the souls made way for him, bowing low as to their king. So he came first to the pit of blood; and soon as he was 'ware of Odysseus he said in a lamentable voice: 'What marvel is this that thou hast done, son of Laertes, and how couldst thou dare to enter the abode of the Dead?'

'I came, O Achilles, to seek counsel of Teiresias the Seer, how I might return to my home. For alas, not yet have I set foot on Ithaca, nor on any Greek soil; but ever since leaving Troy I have wandered to and fro upon the seas in toils and

troubles without end. So evil is the fate allotted me—how different from *yours*, Achilles! There never was, no, nor ever will be, a happier man than you; for in your lifetime we Greeks paid you such honours as are rendered to the gods, and now in death you are king over all the folk of this wide land.'

But Achilles answered: 'Speak not to me, Odysseus, words of comfort concerning death. Far rather would I drudge for hire under some poor man's roof that has scarce bread for his household, if only I might be alive upon the earth, than reign over all the nations of the dead. . . . But come, give me tidings of my young son. Did he come to lead my Myrmidons at Troy and take my place among the Greek princes? And the old man, my father Peleus—does he yet hold sway among our people, or do they set him at naught because of his age and infirmities? Ah, could I come back to the light of day, such as I was when I slew my thousands before Troy walls, full soon and full dearly should they pay for it if they have robbed the old man of his dues'.

'Of Peleus I have heard nothing,' said Odysseus, 'but of your son Neoptolemus I have much to tell you. I myself fetched him from Scyros at the bidding of our chiefs; and youth though he

was, he proved equal to the best of us both in council and in fight. As for the warriors he slew, I could not tell you their names, so many they were; but the chiefest was the Mysian Prince Eurypylus, the goodliest man that ever I saw save Memnon, son of the Morning. And when we who were chosen by lot lay ambushed in the Wooden Horse that Epeus devised, to take Troy by stratagem—then, I say, the rest of us trembled, and wept for dread of discovery. But your son, he only neither grew pale nor shed a tear; he was all impatience to sally out from the Horse. Nay, he kept his hand on his sword-hilt the whole time, so intent was he on the coming slaughter of the Trojans. So when we sacked Priam's town next day, Neoptolemus had a right noble share of the spoil, as well he deserved; and sailed home with it on board ship. And, moreover, he returned from the war not only safe but sound; for he was never once wounded in all his many and desperate combats.'

When Odysseus had thus spoken, the soul of Achilles went away with long strides across the asphodel meadow, joying that his son had won so great renown in war.

The souls of other heroes, once his comrades, spoke each in turn with Odysseus, and told their

woeful stories. But Ajax stood apart, in sullen silence. For still he nursed bitter wrath against the man who by his wiles and glib speech had defrauded him of the precious Arms of Achilles. Odysseus was fain to soothe him, and said: ‘Are you still angry, great Ajax, because of those accursed golden arms? Surely Zeus sent them for a bane to the Greeks, seeing that the loss of them caused *your* death, our tower of strength. Believe me, all our host mourned for you even as they mourned for Achilles himself. But Ajax, blame not me for the death you died; rather blame Zeus, who thereby wreaked his wrath upon us all—and come hither now and speak to me’.

But Ajax answered him never a word, nor looked at him, but departed.

And now a daring wish came into the heart of Odysseus that he might traverse the asphodel meadow, even to the House of Hades, God of the Dead, and behold Queen Persephone in her beauty. He longed also to see the famous sinners of olden time whose eternal torments the gods had made known to men for their warning—Ixion, bound upon an ever-whirling wheel; Sisyphus, vainly labouring to roll a huge stone to a hill-top; and Tantalus, tormented by

hunger and thirst, breast-deep in a pool of water that vanished when he stooped to drink, beneath fruit-laden boughs that the wind for ever tossed out of his reach. But at that moment, with a great crying as of sea-birds, an innumerable multitude of the souls came rushing towards him over the meadow, and he turned and fled to the beach. ‘Queen Persephone is angry,’ he thought, ‘that I linger here when my errand is done. What if she send forth against me the spectre of the dread Gorgon, the sight whereof will turn me to stone?’

Then with all speed he and his comrades got to sea again; and as soon as they had rowed out a little way and hoisted sail, the wind Circe raised for them wafted them swiftly on their course. All day they sailed, and at nightfall once more landed on her isle.

IV

A great fire of logs and brushwood was burning on the shore. Beside it stood Circe, her gold and scarlet robe lit up by the glow; near by, her four handmaidens were setting out a goodly meal from baskets—meat ready roasted, white bread, honey, and jars of wine. Smilingly she greeted

Odysseus and his crew as they stepped ashore. ‘Ah, friends,’ she said, ‘reckless adventurers you are indeed, who must needs go twice to Death’s abode, which others visit once only. Come, now, eat and drink, and sleep beside your ship this night, and to-morrow you shall set sail again.’

And the men did as she bade them, glad at heart because they saw the witch would not take them to her house again, but let them go free. When they had feasted, she took Odysseus by the hand and led him apart from the rest, and inquired of him what he had seen and done. And when he had related it all, she told him the course he must steer, the perils he would meet on his voyage, and how he might escape them. But chiefly she warned him, as did Teiresias, not to touch the sacred Herds of the Sun, for that would be his undoing. After that, she bade him farewell. . . .

Next morning the crew were eager to depart; but Odysseus was mindful of his promise to Elpenor’s ghost, and taking his men with him he went up to the house of Circe. The doors were closed and all was silent within. They found the dead body lying where it had fallen, and bore it down to the shore and gave it the rites of burning and burial, weeping and mourning for their

comrade. Also they raised a great mound, and set his oar thereon for a memorial. And when all this was done, they sailed away with a fair wind from Aeaea, isle of enchantments.

Many adventures still awaited Odysseus before he came home at last; but of all that befell him in his long wanderings, I think the two things that dwelt clearest in his remembrance were his sojourn with Circe and his visit to the Land of Shadows.

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THE POISONED ROBE

As when Alcides, from Oechalia crowned
With conquest, felt the envenomed robe, and tore
Through pain up by the roots Thessalian pines,
And Lichas from the top of Oeta threw
Into the Euboic sea.

Paradise Lost, ii, 542.

I

‘THEN you will not come to our festival, gracious lady? We had hoped it might cheer you—the procession will be splendid, and we three are to lead the choir of girls.’

‘Kind and dear maidens, you must forgive me. I should love to hear your fresh voices raise the hymn to Artemis. But my heart is too heavy to share in rejoicings. Nay, troubled as I am, my presence would but cloud the brightness of your festal day.’

The last speaker, a woman of great beauty though no longer young, smiled tenderly at the three fair-haired girls who stood before her—then turned her head aside and wiped away with her broidered veil the tears that suddenly brimmed her eyes.

'But you need not go yet,' she added, recovering herself, 'it is still early. Stay, dear children, and bear me company a little while. And you, Chloris, tell me about the procession to the temple and the games that are to follow.'

'Dearest princess,' answered the girl who had first spoken, 'you are always too good to us. But I would rather not speak of such matters while you are thus sad. May I ask you a question instead?'

'Surely, child,' said the lady; 'only sit down first beside me.' And she pointed to the marble bench, strewn with cushions, on which she sat.

It was a delicious morning of early summer. The little town of Trachis, 'mountain-built with peaceful citadel', had been astir since daybreak, its pious folk all busied with preparations for the yearly Feast of Artemis. Only in one dwelling—a large, stately house a little way outside the walls—silence reigned instead of joyous bustle. It was in the forecourt of this house that the three girls, daughters of thriving citizens, talked with their honoured friend, its mistress. From where they now sat beside her they could see beyond the rich, flower-spangled pastures of the glen, a ribbon of sparkling sea—and beyond that, the blue hills of the long island of Euboea. On

their right huge Mount Oeta, dark with pine-forest, stood sentinel over the little white-walled burg at his foot. Beneath the azure sky of Greece, and bathed in her crystalline air, the prospect was one to gladden the eyes of the most sorrowful. At least these maidens thought so; but they were very young. Their older companion gazed at it sadly, absently . . . her thoughts seemed far away. After a few moments of silence:

‘What is it you would ask me, Chloris?’ she said.

Half shyly the girl answered: ‘Royal Deianeira, I would—so please you—I would ask why you are so low-spirited to-day. For the portress told us just now there are no tidings yet of your lord and husband, Heracles. Dear lady, he has been very long away—but till now you have been so patient, so hopeful. Forgive me, but should not you trust in Zeus, who has brought him safe through a thousand perils, to watch over him still?’

‘Hush, Chloris, you are over bold,’ said another of the maidens reprovingly. ‘Taking upon yourself to lecture the princess! I wonder to hear you.’

‘Do not chide your sister, Phyllis,’ said Deianeira sweetly. ‘I would have you all talk

freely to me, as to a friend that loves you. And it is true I have had no news of my lord, so her question was but natural. Nay, I am glad you asked it, dear Chloris, for I think it will ease my heart a little to speak out the fear that oppresses me. . . . Alas, alas! I cannot but fear the worst now this day has dawned, and still no tidings! Listen, maidens, and you shall hear the reason—but first I must tell you of things long past, or you will not understand.'

And drawing Chloris to her side—who had blushed scarlet and looked ready to cry at her sister's reproof—Deianeira took the girl's hand in hers and stroked it caressingly now and again while she told her tale. . . .

'There is an old, old saying: "Call no man happy until his life's end". And that is wisdom; for the fairest fortune and that which looks to be firmest rooted may wither in a day, so that 'tis idle to count any mortal happy until Death has closed the reckoning. But some lives are so full of trouble from the beginning that they may be written down *unhappy* before the end—and such has mine been, alas!

'You all know—for all Hellas rang with it—the sorrow that darkened my father's house in my childish days—how Meleager my brother,

the flower of the flock, died untimely by our passionate mother's deed—how in her bitter wrath against him she burned the brand that was his life-charm. . . . Then, yet a girl, younger than any of you, I began to suffer such terrors as never poor maid before. For a strange and frightful wooer haunted me—the wild Spirit of the Achelous River. Three times he came to the palace of my father Oineus and demanded me for his wife—ay, came visibly, in broad daylight, and each time in a different shape, as water-gods can. First like a shaggy mountain-bull—then as a great, dappled snake—then like to a man, but with a bull's face and horns. My father, grown old and feeble, durst not refuse openly, but made pretexts for delay; as for me, in my despair I prayed for death rather than such a bridal. But, at the eleventh hour, came my deliverer—the great-hearted son of Zeus and Alcmena came to our house, seeking hospitality, and saved me as he has saved many another helpless creature. He fought with Achelous on his own river-bank. . . . I was set near at hand to be the winner's prize . . . they grappled . . . I could not watch that dreadful struggle, but shut my eyes, sick and faint. It seemed hours before I heard Heracles calling me by name. . . .

I looked up, and he stood before me, smiling . . . and that horned Terror was fled. And I was married to Heracles the next day—ah, girls, I knew happiness *then*, for you may guess if I loved him, my champion, my man of men. But it was so brief, so brief! Almost ever since I have lived in continual dread for my husband, and as lonely as though I were in truth the widow that my fears often told me I was. . . . For Heracles, it seems, was bound by decree of Zeus to serve his kinsman Eurystheus, King of Argos, for twelve years; and all that time Eurystheus sent him on one perilous quest after another, up and down the world. My children scarce knew their father's face, he was so seldom at home and so long absent from us. Well, that thraldom ended at last, and I looked for peace. But Eurystheus, tyrant that he is, in his jealous hatred of my noble husband, made some pretext for banishing him and his from Argos. My lord brought me hither, saying your worthy king had been his friend of old, and would protect me and the children; but he himself, he said, must go on yet another far journey. Why, or whither, he would not tell me, for all my pleading. "Be of good cheer, my wife," he said, as I wept at leave-taking. "This time I am to encounter

neither giants nor monsters. Trust me, I shall be safe enough; and for your comfort, I promise to be with you again this day twelvemonth. Will that content you?"

"Alas, dear husband," cried I, "how can you promise that, when we know not what a day may bring forth to us poor, short-lived mortals?"

"Why, very true," said he. "Remember, then, I shall return in a year from to-day *if I am alive*. If I do not, you will know that Heracles is—at rest."

'And so he left me . . . the weary time has crept by without ever a word of tidings . . . and, maidens, pity me now, for this is the day he spoke of, and still not a sign! Oh, I cannot but fear the worst, now.'

'But it is early yet,' ventured Chloris. 'Why should you give up hope already, lady? Think, noble Heracles may be close at hand even now—at any moment he may be with you again!'

'That is what I keep telling her,' exclaimed a shrill, grumbling voice; 'but she heeds me no more than if I were a magpie. I have nursed her children, and herself too—but that goes for nothing, of course. Oh, no, I'm just a poor, ignorant old slave you see, my pretty maids; nobody cares what *I say*.'

The girls looked round, smiling slyly at each other, as a grey-haired, wrinkled woman hobbled towards them from the house. Like every one else in Trachis, they knew that this faithful servant ruled her gentle mistress with undisputed sway.

'Ah, nurse,' said Deianeira, sighing deeply, 'I know what you say is very right—very sensible, as always. But the truth is, I have the strangest foreboding of some evil to befall . . . call me foolish if you will, but I cannot shake it off.'

'Dreams and omens come from the gods,' said the old woman, 'and forebodings too, sometimes. But sometimes they turn out false, and that kind come from nothing but brooding and fretting, as you have been doing this long while, and I hope and pray and believe that yours is just one of those. Nay, I'll be bound it is, sweet mistress; for no news is good news, you know—and if anything had gone amiss with our lord Heracles we should be sure to have heard of it by this time.'

'I have no faith in your proverb, nurse,' said Deianeira, shaking her head sadly. 'Nay, to have had no news—not even a rumour of any sort, for a whole twelvemonth seems to me the worst sign there could be. It is the very main-

spring of my fears. . . . Why, on all his other journeys Heracles has never been absent more than half a year; yet *some* report of him always reached us during that time—word would come through shipmen or travellers that he had been seen or heard of in such and such places, going or returning. How could his comings and goings *not* be noised abroad everywhere, so famous as he is? Yet now—not the least whisper comes; he seems to have disappeared from human sight. . . . Oh, *what* can it mean?’ Sobbing, she added: ‘Alas, where could the light of his glorious deeds be so long hidden—except in the grave?’

‘Do not speak unlucky words, my child, do not,’ exclaimed the old nurse with alarm; and: ‘Hush, princess, hush!’ murmured the girls in chorus.

Then Chloris said: ‘Dearest lady, though I am only a simple, unlessoned girl, a thought has come to me that perhaps may comfort you a little. Might it not be that you got news of great Heracles on his former journeys because you were living in that rich, ancient city of Argos, where traders and travellers are always flocking by sea and land—and get none here because there is no one to bring it? For no one *does* come to our sleepy little town, you know!

Right out of the world it is, as my father often says, and perched up among the hills like a crow's nest on a tree-top. Why, we hear next to nothing even about what goes on in Euboea over yonder!'

'You speak like a wise girl,' cried the nurse; 'and I warrant you have hit the truth of the matter. To be sure, the moon might fall out of the sky and we never hear of it, in this out-of-the-way corner! So do you know what I would do, my lady, instead of pining and tormenting yourself about your husband? I would send someone to look for him directly—that is, if you cannot just wait and see whether he does not come to-day, after all.'

'I have thought of that often,' said Deianeira, 'but I have no one to send, alas!'

'You have Hyllas,' answered the nurse. 'He is very young, to be sure, but a fine, manly lad, and has a head on his shoulders. In my poor opinion, being the eldest son it 's his duty to go in search of his father, and so I should tell him, if I were you.'

'He would go in a moment, if I did,' said Deianeira. 'Hyllas worships his father. From a child his greatest delight has been to hear me tell his marvellous adventures, and already—for

the dear boy is grave and thoughtful beyond his years—I can see his whole mind is bent on proving a worthy son of Heracles. But dare I send him out into the world—alone? If we had the herald Lichas,¹ now, or any of the old retainers to go with him! . . .’

‘I never thought much of that Lichas,’ put in the nurse; ‘a pushing, meddlesome fellow! We had no great loss when my lord left *him* behind at Argos—where most likely he serves Eurystheus now.’

‘No, no,’ said Deianeira. ‘Lichas would not do that, I am sure. Whatever his faults, he loves his master, and would have followed him into exile, only Heracles forbade him. “What does a banished man want with a herald, my good fellow?” he said. . . . But there is another difficulty, dear nurse—I could not tell Hyllas even in what direction to go—east, west, south, or north! Always, before, I at least knew to what country Heracles was bound, and even if it was an unknown land, in which quarter of the world it lay. . . . O nurse, *why* did he keep his errand a secret from me this last and only time?’

¹ In Heroic times the Greek herald was the confidential servant of a king or chief, managed his affairs, and acted as his envoy in war, the person of a herald being inviolable then as ever since.

That is the strangest thing of all . . . so unlike his frank, open ways.'

'Why? For some good reason, you may be sure,' replied the old woman sagely. 'But never mind that now, for as I was saying——'

Here eager cries from the maidens interrupted her.

'News! See, here comes news at last!' they exclaimed. And as Deianeira rose up, trembling violently, Chloris cried joyously:

"Tis *good* news, dear princess — look, the messenger wears a garland in sign of it!"

II

The 'messenger' whom the girls' quick eyes had noted running towards the house, now dashed full speed into the courtyard, and halted, panting for breath, before the group of women. He was a shrewd-faced, oldish man, in peasant dress. As soon as he had recovered breath: 'My Lady Deianiera,' he cried, 'I'm the first to tell you what will banish your cares—Heracles is alive! What's more, has won a victory—and is bringing home grand booty'.

Deianiera looked at him like one dazed; she had turned very pale.

'What . . . what did you say, good friend?' she asked faintly.

'Why, what ails you, gracious madam?' he exclaimed, staring. 'Didn't you hear me? . . . Don't you know me—old Philemon the gardener, that sells you herbs and honey?'

'It is the sudden joy,' cried the old nurse. 'My lady will be well in a moment.'

'I *am* well—quite well,' said her mistress impatiently. 'Tell me again, good Philemon—is my lord really alive and safe? Are you sure it is true? And coming home, did you say?'

'Ay, I said so, and you 'll find it 's true enough,' said the gardener gleefully.

'But where did you hear this, Philemon? Who can have told you?'

'Why, 'twas Lichas the herald,' replied Philemon. 'He came and proclaimed the news in the Oxen Field, where the whole town was assembling for to-day's sports. I no sooner heard his tale than off I ran—thinking to please you—and maybe profit myself a bit too—by being first to bring good tidings.'

'Lichas here!' cried Deianeira, astonished. 'Then why does he not come to me himself? Good Philemon, you have well earned a reward,

and shall have it—but I burn to see Lichas.
Why does he keep me waiting?’

‘He can’t help it, lady,’ said Philemon with a grin. ‘Our folk were wild to hear the whole story from beginning to end, and they crowded round him asking a hundred questions at once, so that he couldn’t get away from them. But he was doing his best, and I could see he wouldn’t be long after me—that was why I ran all the way.’

‘It is too wonderful—I cannot grasp it,’ murmured Deianeira; ‘but I thank Zeus for his mercy.’ She went swiftly to the household altar in the middle of the court and, raising her eyes and clasped hands to heaven, began to sing the hymn of thanksgiving for victory in sweet, faltering tones. The maidens took it up with their clear voices . . . as for the nurse, she ran with exulting cries into the house, whence she quickly returned followed by the rest of the servants bringing incense and flowers. Then all joined in the triumphal chant, while their mistress kindled the incense-cakes on the altar and wreathed the flowers around it.

Just as the hymn ended, a loud ‘All hail!’ rang out from the gateway, and Lichas entered—a small, spare man, black-bearded, with inquisitive, beady eyes. He carried a herald’s

staff, and walked with the stately, deliberate gait that heralds affected. After him, in single file, came ten women, young and comely. Some were weeping silently; the faces of all were pale and tear-stained; they followed Lichas submissively, their heads bowed. Halting them by an imperious wave of his staff, he advanced to meet Deianeira with a self-satisfied smile, and greeted her ceremoniously.

‘Right royal lady and mistress,’ he began, ‘my happy errand is——’

‘My dear, excellent Lichas,’ she broke in impulsively. ‘Tell me this first of all—is Heracles indeed coming home safe and well?’

‘I left him but a few hours ago,’ replied Lichas, ‘enjoying not only health, but happiness—the happiness of a conqueror—and preparing a great burnt-sacrifice to Zeus in thanksgiving for his victory. As soon as this is duly performed, he will hasten hither; meanwhile he presents you with these damsels, the choicest of his spoils, to be your handmaids.’

‘Ah, they are captives, then,’ said Deianiera, softly. ‘How piteous that is! . . . But where was the war, Lichas? Surely far away from here—yet you left Heracles only a few hours ago, you say?’

'No farther away than Euboea,' answered Lichas; 'a short sail hence, as you know.'

'Euboea!' echoed Deianeira in astonishment. 'Is *that* where my lord has been all this long, weary while . . . and I mourning him as lost?'

The herald gave her an uneasy glance. 'No, no,' he said soothingly, 'of course not. Nearly all the time he was far away . . . in Lydia . . . that was why you heard nothing . . . and it was best, lady, you should not. For the truth is . . . he was sold as a slave over there, to a Lydian woman—Omphale, her name is—and served her nine months.'

'Impossible,' flashed out Deianeira. 'Heracles would sooner have died than endure such dishonour. *He* a slave—and to a barbarian woman! Who can have told you so base a slander?'

'Nay, I tell you what I heard from my master's own lips,' said Lichas. 'As for dishonour, 'tis no reproach to any man to submit to the will of Zeus . . . and *He* ordained that servitude for Heracles . . . as the punishment of bloodguiltiness. For once, when Heracles on his travels sought hospitality from King Eurytus of Euboea, the king and his son Iphitus, flown with insolence and wine, turned him from their doors; ay, and heaped taunts upon him, crying out that no

bondman of Eurystheus should sit at their table. Therefore, when chance brought young Iphitus to Argos not long afterwards, Heracles caused his death—by a seeming accident. 'Twas said the youth had slipped and fallen over a cliff. . . . But who can deceive all-seeing Zeus? By his command, Hermes of the Golden Wand carried my master overseas to Lydia, and, in the guise of a slave-merchant, sold him into bondage for the time appointed.'

'That, then, was the far journey Heracles said he must take,' exclaimed Deianeira. 'I little thought . . . but go on, good Lichas. Tell me the rest, I pray you.'

'Heracles was no sooner a free man again,' went on the herald, 'than he sped back to Greece, and mustered a force of free lances to make war on King Eurytus. For, as he said, he had sworn a great oath that the man who had brought the yoke of slavery upon him should see his own house and city cast under the same. Many of his old comrades in arms and retainers joined him, and *I* among the first. We laid siege to Oechalia, and took it by storm—not without much hard fighting, for Eurytus and the townsmen made a stubborn defence. And so that insolent king has paid with his blood and his people's for the

outrage he did to mighty Heracles, and all that was his is the spoil of the conqueror! Rejoice, then, lady, and be glad; for this is indeed a day of high good fortune.'

As the herald thus concluded exultantly, cries of: 'O happy day!' 'Joy, joy to our mistress!' arose from the household slaves; the maidens of Trachis likewise cried: 'O thrice-happy Deianeira!' and bade her rejoice.

'I do, I must rejoice . . . in my dear lord's safety,' she answered slowly; 'and . . . for his sake . . . in his victory. And yet . . . there is something affrighting in great success . . . the thought will come: "A little while, and all this may be changed!" Dear friends, my heart misgives me sorely . . . ah, with too much reason, when I behold yonder most piteous sight.'

She was looking earnestly at the group of captives, standing silent and motionless at a little distance, and as she looked, her tears fell.

'Homeless, orphaned, enslaved,' she murmured, 'perhaps nobly born, tenderly reared . . . only yesterday safe and happy . . . and to-day in such misery! What if a like fate should be in store for *my* children? Merciful Zeus, grant, at least, I may not live to see it!'

Her pitying gaze now rested on a very young

girl, almost a child, whose delicate fairness and singular grace of bearing marked her out from the rest.

'She is of some noble house,' thought Deianeira; and going quickly up to her: 'My poor child, she said gently, 'will you tell me your name?'

The captive lifted her downcast eyes for an instant to Deianeira's, and a burning blush suddenly overspread her pale face. She averted her head in silence. Fearing to have distressed her, Deianeira turned away—to see Lichas watching them suspiciously; lowering her voice, she asked: 'Who is that maiden, Lichas? I pity her most of all—she seems to feel her fate so deeply'.

'How should I know? . . . Why should you ask?' stammered he. 'I . . . I fancy she belongs to . . . a great house, over yonder.'

'Do you mean the king's? Had Eurytus a daughter?'

'I cannot say . . . I never troubled to inquire.'

'But did you not even hear her name?'

Lichas shook his head. 'Not I,' he said carelessly. "'Twas none of my business to learn it.'

'I shall ask it of herself, then,' cried Deianeira; and turning again to the stranger: 'Let me beg

you,' she said with winning courtesy, 'to tell me who you are. I ask, believe me, from my deep interest in one so unfortunate . . . and, as I can see, nobly born.'

But the girl stood mute and rigid as a graven image; only, now, great tears rolled down her wan cheeks.

'Let her be, let her be,' said Lichas hastily. 'You will get nothing out of her—not a word has she uttered since she was taken, but just keeps on crying. You must excuse her, noble mistress, she is distraught with grief.'

'Nay, I would not be troublesome to her for the world,' said Deianeira compassionately. 'Heaven knows, she has enough to bear, without that! Let her be taken into the house, the poor child, and have every comfort and care. Come, we will all go in together—do you, Lichas, lead in your charges.'

'Heracles bade me return, as soon as I had delivered them to you——' began the herald.

'So you shall, good friend,' Deianeira answered; 'but you must take messages and greetings to my lord, which I will give you presently.'

Without more words, Lichas ushered the captives into the house. Deianeira's servants trooped after them at a sign from their mistress.

She herself was about to follow, when a gruff voice exclaimed:

'Hist, lady! Wait a moment—there's something I must say to you.' And the gardener Philemon shuffled forward with a mysterious air.

'Now the coast is clear, except for these good lasses,' he said, glancing at Chloris and her companions, 'I can speak out. . . . You are being deceived and tricked, noble lady. That rascal of a herald has told you a pack of lies!'

Deianeira looked at him in bewilderment. 'What can you mean? What lies? I think you must have lost your wits, Philemon.'

'Just you listen to me,' said the gardener earnestly, 'and you'll soon see I'm talking sense. . . . Hasn't the fellow just reeled off a long yarn about Heracles being grossly wronged by King Eurytus, and making this war as reprisals? Very well! Not two hours ago I—and hundreds of others, mark you!—heard Lichas say, and swear to it, that Heracles made the war because he had fallen madly in love with yonder captive maid I saw you speaking to—and her father had refused to let him take her for his mistress.'

A low moan broke from Deiameira. 'She—that child?' she half whispered. 'But . . .

Lichas told me he did not know who she was . . .'

She paused, with a sudden pang of comprehension. The herald's evasive replies—his uneasiness when she approached the captive—above all, the girl's strange look at her, and that deep, painful blush! . . . Yes, it was all clear now. . . . An immense wave of pity swept over her. She thought: 'Only a noble nature could feel such shame . . . she suffers more than I do'.

The gardener partly caught her last words. 'Lichas not know who she was!' he repeated indignantly. 'Why, ay, that was the most barefaced lie of all! I nearly stepped forward and taxed him with it, only I was fairly tongue-tied at the knave's impudence. . . . He little knew one of the crowd he spoke to down yonder had got here before him, and was listening with all his ears! . . . Ah, here he comes to look for you. . . . Now, master herald, here stands the noble lady your mistress—*who has got one more question for you*. Ask him, good madam, ask him if it isn't King Eurytus' daughter Iole, his master's light-o'-love, that he has brought under your roof—and let him deny it if he dare.'

III

It was a somewhat crestfallen Lichas who stood in Deianeira's chamber about an hour later. He had blustered for a moment—tried to order the rough-looking stranger about his business; but he saw in one glance at his mistress's face that it was useless to dissemble further. He began a mumbled apology; she quietly said that she would send for him presently, and walked past him into the house. Immediately after, the nurse had bustled out, and drawn that objectionable stranger aside; she seemed to be offering him something, but he shook his head and hurried off. The nurse exchanged whispers with a group of girls who were lingering in the court; and they likewise departed, except one, who followed her indoors. Then Lichas too had gone in, and busied himself with overseeing the settling-in of the captive women until he should be summoned. . . .

Deianeira was leaning wearily back in a low chair; the girl Chloris sat near, watching her with fond, anxious eyes.

'I have not deserved this, Lichas,' she began in her gentle voice; 'I am not so vicious-tempered,

nor so ignorant of what life is—what *men* are—that I could not be safely trusted with the truth. . . . My lord forgets’—with a quivering lip—‘that *I* am not a child, but a woman who has loved and suffered too much not to understand—and pardon.’

‘You must not blame *him*, lady,’ said Lichas, touched into honesty for once. ‘My master knows nothing about the deception. I invented the story myself—all, that is, except his having killed Iphitus and been sold into slavery in Lydia—but, believe me, I only meant to spare you pain.’

‘For how long?’ said Deianeira, with a sad smile. ‘Ah, Lichas, you meant kindly, I know, but truth is the only real kindness to natures like mine. Let me know the worst, and face it, always! I have had much to bear, you know, sometimes—but never deceit—Heracles never stooped to that. Thanks, Lichas, for telling me I wronged him there. How *could* I,’ she added tenderly; ‘so frank and high-minded he is—so noble in his very faults!’

‘Sits the wind there again?’ thought Lichas. ‘All’s well, now, then. Well, my dear lady,’ he said briskly, ‘Heracles will be right glad to hear you take things so calmly and reasonably. For his sake—and your own—let me urge you to be

kind and friendly not only towards *him*, but towards—your new housemate.'

'How could I be otherwise?' said Deianiera simply. 'Do you think I can feel one spark of enmity or bitterness against that most unhappy child—who has done me no wrong? At first sight, my heart ached with pity for her . . . and how much more now, when I know the whole unutterable cruelty of her fate. Think of it, Lichas . . . so young, so lovely . . . and that very loveliness made a curse to her, bringing ruin and death upon her father's house and her native land!'

'Certainly,' said Lichas, 'Iole cannot help her beauty, which, as you say, was the root of all the trouble; but few women would speak so generously of a rival. I feared that a natural jealousy——'

'Enough, herald,' said Deianeira with dignity. 'You have already taken too much upon you—do not presume further on your office. Commend me to my lord and husband, and take him this gift from me in return for—what he has sent me.'

So saying, she took from a table beside her a cedar-wood box, clamped with silver, and handed it to the herald.

'It is not locked,' she said, 'but sealed with

my own seal, which Heracles will recognize. Bid him put on the rich robe that is in it when he offers to Zeus the sacrifice of thanksgiving that you told me of—and say I made and have kept it purposely to adorn him on a day of victory, and therefore beg he will wear it without fail.'

'I shall do your errand faithfully, noble mistress,' returned the herald, 'and will now take my leave, for I must hasten back to assist at the solemn rites. But now I think of it, where is your son Hyllus all this time? It would be fitting he should go with me and greet his father.'

'Ah, you have not heard, then,' said Deianiera. 'Word came to the house just now that Hyllus has already set out for Euboea. It seems he went out early to see the festival here, heard you proclaim the great news, and rushed down to the shore, where he chartered a boat from his friends the fishermen.'

'That was just like him,' said the herald admiringly. 'Prompt and self-reliant—a true son of Heracles, as I always foretold of him. Well, gracious lady, it only remains that I should bid you farewell.' And he bowed himself out of the room. . . .

There was a brief silence; Deianeira shifted uneasily in her chair; her fingers plucked nervously at the folds of her gold-embroidered gown. And then: 'Chloris, dear Chloris,' she said, 'how good you were to give up your day of pleasure to stay with me. Your loving sympathy is very precious to me—and I need it, I am so alone—with none to help or advise me. I have taken a daring step—I fear too hastily, but in my torturing perplexity it suddenly seemed the one hope. . . . And I want to tell you about it . . . yes, I *must* speak. Chloris, I am going to trust you with a great secret, but you will never betray it, I know.'

'Never, belovèd lady,' the girl said earnestly. 'Listen, then,' Deianeira went on. 'That robe I have sent to Heracles holds a love-charm that will win his heart back to me, if indeed I may trust the word of the strange being who gave it me in his dying moments. . . . I was a bride then—ah, how little I thought I should ever need it!—and journeying over the mountains with Heracles to my new home. We had to cross the roaring torrent of the Evenus; and at the ford we found one of the wild Centaurs, Nessus by name, who offered to carry us over for a fee, as he did other travellers. And Heracles,

laughing, lifted me on the centaur's back, but himself waded breast-deep through the ford, ahead of us. But in midstream the man-beast seized me in a fierce embrace—I shrieked with terror—Heracles, who had just reached the bank, turned like lightning, and the next instant an arrow from his bow was quivering in Nessus' side. He plunged ashore and sank down gasping. I slid from his back and stood watching him with pity, for I knew he must die very quickly, and that seemed so cruel, though it had to be. He knew it too. "I am sped," he whispered. "The Hydra's poison is on those arrows. Stay by me but a few moments, wife of Heracles, and let me speak with you alone—it shall avail you much." At that, I begged my lord to wait for me at a little distance, and he consented easily, with a smile at my soft-heartedness.

'And then Nessus did a strange thing . . . he pulled out the arrow from his side, and caught the gush of blood that followed in a small drinking-cup of horn that hung from a leathern thong round his neck. "The ferryman's luck-gift to his last passenger," he said, holding out the cup. "Wrap it in your veil—hide it away, and keep it safe till the day comes when you have need of it." And in broken whispers, for he was dying

fast, he told me that his blood had strong magic in it, whereby I could make my husband love none but me for ever—I had only to anoint a garment with it, and cause Heracles to wear it, and he would have no eyes for any other woman, though she were as fair as Aphrodite herself. But Nessus warned me that I must not let the anointed garment be exposed to sunlight, or the heat of a fire, until Heracles put it on, for that was part of the charm. So I have sent it to him in a sealed casket, as you saw.'

'Yes, I saw,' answered Chloris gravely; 'but I little thought . . . oh, dearest lady, I do not wonder you feel uneasy about this. There are terrible stories about the strange working of love-potions and such-like spells—how they sometimes bring madness, or even death, upon those they are practised on. One of our neighbours has the name of a wise woman, and some maidens that I know have had dealings with her—they say she can make charms with herbs gathered by moonlight and with drugs that she keeps by her, to bring back their sweethearts if they prove fickle. But my mother says she is a witch, and forbids me to go near her—and, indeed, I would never dare, for I believe she has the evil eye. Certainly, it is dangerous to offend her—every

one says that if you do you are sure to fall sick or have bad luck of some kind. And, in my poor thought, there is more harm than good in all magic art, for it is oftenest used for bad ends, as I am sure this woman's is.'

'Nay,' said Deianeira, 'the harm is in those that use it so. Wicked women, I know, have used deadly drugs and enchantments to rid themselves of a rival, or to avenge themselves on a faithless lover—but the gods forbid I should be such a one. I would rather die than hurt one hair of my dear lord's head—ay, and if evil befell him through me I could not live. But it will not—it cannot. . . . I will shake off these fears of I know not what. Do not talk of love-potions, Chloris, for I have sent him none—nothing that can hurt him. The worst that can happen is that the charm may fail—that the centaur's blood has no such power as he said—but even so, I shall have done no harm by trying, and Heracles will never know. . . . Ah, that reminds me! I have left Nessus' drinking-horn on a table in my bedchamber—I must put it away again, lest the nurse should see it and ask questions.'

So saying, she rose and went into an inner room, half closing the door behind her. Chloris

could hear her moving softly to and fro as though putting the room in order, and the sound of a coffer being closed and locked. Then dead silence for a minute or two—and then the door was flung violently open and Deianeira rushed towards her, deathly pale, with terror in her eyes.

'What is it? Oh, what is it?' cried the girl, starting up in dismay.

'The robe,' gasped Deianiera, quivering from head to foot. 'It is poisoned . . . it will kill him. . . . I have killed my husband. . . . O fool, blind fool, not to have seen it was a trap . . . the centaur's revenge!'

Her voice failed; she flung herself down upon a couch and lay hiding her face, shaken with tearless sobs.

To see her patroness, always so self-controlled, thus suddenly overpowered as by a mortal blow, was very terrible to Chloris. Too bewildered to speak, she knelt beside her, trying to soothe her with timid caresses, and casting frightened glances towards the inner room. Deianiera must have seen some dreadful sight, she thought; something—or *someone*—uncanny, for how else could she know, all in a moment, what she had gasped out? But the door stood wide open, and Chloris could see nothing unusual in the room

beyond. Strong sunlight filled it, for its window faced due south; whereas the larger, outer room had windows opening northward, and was now in shade. Perhaps, after all, the dear lady had only been suddenly overcome by panic at what she had done in a reckless moment—and no wonder she should break down, after the trials she had gone through that day!

So thinking, Chloris plucked up courage to say: ‘Sweet lady, these are fancies of your overwrought brain. Do not give way to them, I beg and pray of you! Come, look up, and be comforted—all may yet go well. Nay, you do wrong to despair, for if there *is* danger in the robe—which the gods avert—you cannot be sure of that without proof, and you have none yet’.

‘But I have—I *have* proof,’ cried Deianeira in tones of anguish. She raised herself on the couch, slowly, feebly; and at sight of her wax-white face Chloris exclaimed: ‘Ah, you are faint—ill—let me fetch the old nurse’, and started towards the door.

‘Do not go, do not call any one,’ said Deianeira, more calmly. ‘I need nothing . . . only help me to sit up . . . put the cushions behind me . . . so; now listen, child. Just now, when I had put the horn cup back in my jewel-chest, I

remembered that I had thrown the tuft of wool I used in anointing the robe down on the floor. You see, I found the centaur's blood was still liquid—I thought that nothing strange, it was part of the enchantment—and so was its spreading like oil over the inside of the purple robe, and showing no stain. And being in haste, I smeared it on with the first thing that came to hand, which was a tuft out of the basket of fine, white wool that lay ready for my spinning. . . . I remembered that I threw it down near the window. . . . And I looked . . . and there, on the floor, with the sunlight streaming down on it, I saw a little black thing, like a bit of smouldering charcoal. But it was not charcoal; there were hairs in it . . . and, oh, horrible! . . . drops of something greasy, like foul oil, were trickling from it on the floor. . . . With that, the truth burst on me like a thunderclap. O merciful gods, was ever such folly as mine since you first made womankind? I knew the arrows of Heracles were dipped in the Hydra's venom, one touch whereof turns the blood to liquid flame. Yet I could take blood so tainted as a gift, a love-charm . . . ay, and take the gift from one who lay dying by my husband's hand, and of whose death *I* was the cause! What lunacy

possessed me, that I could not see how Nessus must hate us both, and that any gift he proffered me must be designed to work our ruin? Alas, I pitied him, the strange, tameless creature of the woodlands; and I could forgive him for compassing the death of his enemy . . . a life for a life is wild justice . . . but to strike Heracles through *me* . . . oh, 'twas the malice of a fiend!'

She broke off, shuddering, and there was silence awhile in the chamber. Then, rising from the couch, Deianeira took the maiden of Trachis by the hand and gently kissed her brow. 'Leave me now, dear Chloris,' she said. 'It grows late, and it is time you were at home. Take the last warmth of my lips, for something tells me this is farewell indeed, and your friend will shortly be with them that rest.'

IV

'Mother! O gods, that I must call you so! But I will not—I will not give that sacred name to the woman who is my father's murderer.'

He who thus spoke, a tall, handsome boy of about fifteen, stood looking at Deianeira with a countenance full of grief and horror. It was now evening, and she, racked with suspense, had

stolen out into the courtyard to watch for the coming of some messenger with tidings from Euboea. The old nurse, who had followed her with vain prayers that she would take food and repose, sat dejectedly on the steps leading up to the house door, mumbling to herself, while her mistress paced restlessly to and fro. As her son entered the court, Deianeira had flown to meet him; but his first words made her shrink back as from a blow.

'Hyllus, my Hyllus,' she said piteously, 'do not say such things—do not look at me like that! What have I done to deserve it?'

'What have you done!' repeated the boy bitterly. 'Do you dare ask that of *me*, who have just seen your hideous work with my own eyes—seen the noblest man on earth foully done to death—and he my father? Well,' with a kind of cold fury, 'you shall hear what you have done, since you do not know. It is a tale worth hearing—by such a loyal wife. Now, listen. . . .'

He paused, struggling with emotion; then went on in a dull, expressionless voice, as though keeping stern hold of himself.

'I found my father on the steep headland they call Cenaeum, at the north end of the island; he was busied with marking out a sanctuary and

setting up altars to Zeus, for a memorial of his victory. It was a happy meeting, and Heracles was full of glee and triumph. He was to offer a great burnt-sacrifice—twelve bulls, a hundred sheep and goats—and the altar-fires had just been kindled when Lichas arrived with your gift of the robe—that deadly robe. As soon as Heracles heard your message, he put it on with delight, bidding us admire its richness—and your kind forethought. “She has sent me,” he exclaimed, “the one thing needful to complete the pomp of my thanksgiving.” And with exulting mien he took his stand before the chief altar, and began with a loud voice his prayer to Zeus. But as the flames, fed with sappy pine-logs, blazed high on the altar, suddenly we saw beads of sweat break out upon him, and the robe shrinking and shrivelling, till it clung as though glued upon his flesh. . . . A frightful spasm convulsed him from head to foot. With a roar of pain, he turned on Lichas, and bade him confess what plot he had laid to destroy him. The poor wretch protested that he was innocent—he had delivered the casket sealed as it left your hands, and knew nothing at all about the robe except what you had told him to say, which he had faithfully repeated without thought of

evil. And we could all see that the man was telling the truth. Poor, vain fool, he was no traitor—only the catspaw of a traitress. But Heracles, maddened with fiery pangs, could neither hear nor heed; he seized Lichas by the ankle, whirled him aloft as though he weighed no more than a kidling, and flung him sheer over the cliff. Drowned? No. He fell upon the beach, and his brains were dashed out on a jagged rock. So died your first victim. . . . And at that, a groan of pity and horror burst from the assembled multitude; and all shrank back, avoiding to come within reach of Heracles. Yet I think their pity was for him as much as for Lichas—so frightful it was to see that mighty, magnificent frame in the throes of a hell-born torment. Now he rolled in the dust, and now leaped high in air, like a wine-frenzied dancer. All the while, he kept tearing off fragments of the robe, that came away in blood-stained strips, with a crackling, hissing sound, and left dreadful marks on the scorched flesh beneath. All the while, he made the hills echo round us with noises like the roaring of a wounded lion. . . .

‘At last, his wild eyes lighted on me, where I stood weeping amid the throng, and in hoarse, broken accents he said: “My son, come near . . .

do not fail me in this plight. I am dying . . . but you will stay by me . . . though you should die the same death." . . . I was at his side in a moment, then, in painful whispers—for his strength was failing—he begged me to take him away . . . not to let him die there, in Euboea . . . he wanted to die in some quiet, lonely place, where there would be nobody to see. . . .

'I promised—what would I not have promised at that moment?—and he pressed my hand, to show that he understood; then a sort of trance came over him. And I had him carried down to the shore, and laid among wraps and cushions in a boat; and we have rowed him across the strait . . . yes, and he is to be brought on a litter to this house, this home of his, for where else could I find shelter for him? So, pray understand, you will see your husband very soon . . . he will most likely be dead . . . but you need not mind if he is not, for he cannot have many hours to live.'

Hyllus ended with a sob that choked his utterance; but with a final effort at composure: 'Mother,' he said, 'for mother of mine you are, to my shame and sorrow, you have heard from your son's lips—since you willed it so—the story of your guilt. You have destroyed—the gods alone know what prompted you to such fiendish

wickedness—the greatest hero that ever walked this earth; and by the vilest treachery caused him to die in lingering torments. And for that crime may the goddess Justice, and the Furies of nethermost hell that are her appointed ministers, wreak due vengeance upon you . . . if such a curse be lawful for me to utter. Nay, it *is* lawful—seeing you yourself have transgressed all law, human and divine.'

Deianeira had listened all this while as mute and motionless as though her son's tale had turned her to stone; but at his last words she visibly shuddered, and clasped her hands over her eyes, which till then had been fixed on his with a kind of dreadful, hungry pleading. Then, still silent, she drew her veil over her face, turned from him, and glided swiftly into the house. The old nurse, cowering on the steps, scrambled to her feet and cried: 'Stay, my lady, stay! Why don't you tell him the truth? Speak to him, for mercy's sake speak, Deianeira! Child, stay—where are you going?'

But Deianeira went past her without word or sign. At that, the old woman burst into tears; Hyllus came up to her and said sternly: 'Let her go, nurse—the sooner she is out of my sight the better, I tell you. Ay, she has gone off to exult

in secret over her handiwork. May she have as much—joy of it . . . as that gift of hers has brought my father!’

‘Now, the gods forgive you those words, and the curse you uttered in your blindness, unhappy boy!’ exclaimed the nurse. ‘Nay, hear me, Hyllus, for I *will* speak—your mother is innocent—she knew no more than you or I that there was aught deadly in the robe, when she sent it. She knew, at least she guessed, afterwards—but not until too late to overtake her messenger.’

‘Oh, you take her part, do you?’ answered Hyllus scornfully. ‘But you would, of course. Faithful slave that you are, how readily you lie, to save your mistress! But that plea will not serve—it is too manifestly false, seeing she herself did not deny her guilt.’

‘No, she did not, and I can tell you why,’ said the old woman, with such earnestness and dignity in her look and tone as transformed her for the moment. ‘I can tell you why,’ she repeated, ‘though I *am* a slave—base-born, ignorant—yes, but yet a woman, and one that has known motherhood. And I see—though I did not for a moment, being old and stupid—I see that my lady, in her nobleness, *could* not answer you. O child that I nursed on my knees, don’t you

see that, too? Her son, her own beloved son, comes and taxes her with the murder of his father! He can believe *that* of her; of the mother whose loving care has surrounded him from his birth till now—whose sweet nature none can know so well as he. And she *does not deny it*—she makes no answer! Hyllus, Hyllus, ask yourself—what answer was possible, from *her to you?*'

At that instant, shrill screams, as of frightened women, arose within the house. A handmaid, with pale, scared face, appeared in the doorway and cried out: 'Nurse, where are you? Come, come quick, for the love of the gods!'

The old nurse threw up her hands with a gesture of despair, and looking wildly at Hyllus: '*There is your answer, boy,*' she said, and rushed into the house.

V

The midsummer moon, now in her full splendour, flooded the courtyard with her silver light, and paled the glow of burning torches, held by a company of men-at-arms who were gathered near the gate. In the midst of that group stood a litter heaped with pillows, broidered coverlets,

and pelts of wolf and bear; and among these wrappings lay a quiet form, over which Hyllus was bending in silent anguish.

'The fiery pangs are past,' said a faint voice from the litter, 'but I am dying . . . the potent poison quite o'ercrowns my spirit. My son, are you beside me still? I cannot see you . . .'

'Yes, father, yes, I am here,' answered Hyllus, and taking the languid hand that was stretched forth to him, he pressed it to his lips and bathed it in hot tears.

'I am dying,' said Heracles again, 'and by foul treachery . . . which you must avenge, my son, if ever you loved your father. But no . . . I have strength enough left for a last act of justice . . . *my* hand shall slay the traitress. . . . I shall die easier, knowing she has paid the price of her sin . . . and gone before me to that dark bourne whence none returns. Your mother, Hyllus, your vile mother has undone me . . . bring her to me, I say, this instant. . . . Must I bid twice? Away with you, boy, and beware a father's curse if you linger.'

'Father,' said the boy, white to the lips, and speaking with difficulty, 'I would have spared you this—but since you accuse my mother, you must know all. *I* accused her, too . . . the gods

forgive me, I cursed her to her face. And she turned and left me, without a word. But the old nurse was there, and showed me the truth—alas, too late! Father, she was guiltless—the drug she smeared on that fatal robe was given her by an enemy, who made her believe it was a love-charm . . . she used it only for that . . . you know why.'

And then, brokenly and briefly, he repeated the story of the centaur's gift, which the nurse had drawn from Deianeira in those hours of anguished waiting.

When he had made an end, Heracles said, dreamily and low: 'Nessus . . . art *thou* my slayer? Then the oracle of Zeus is fulfilled, that was given me at Dodona, long ago. . . . The black ringdove uttered it from amid the boughs of the sacred oak:

Fear not living mortal's blow;
A dead man's hand shall lay thee low.'

Then, rousing himself: 'But Deianeira . . . I have wronged her. . . . I would make amends. Hyllus, bid your mother come to me. Quick, why do you loiter? Tell her I know all . . . and forgive her. Nay,' more faintly, 'tell her to come and forgive *me* . . . there is need'.

'O father, father,' said Hyllus, sobbing, 'she has forgiven you, and me too, I know it, in her great love. But she cannot come to you—not ever again. She . . . when she left me, she went into her chamber, and shut the door. . . . And a little while after they found her there, lying on her bed as if asleep. . . . But there was a dagger in her heart. Too well, too well I see now, what drove her to such an end.'

'Dead, then,' muttered Heracles; 'but I will overtake thee, Deianeira, on the dark road. Soon, very soon, will I be with thee again, true wife! But, woe is me, I feel the fiery poison-pangs creeping over me yet again. . . . I'll not die so . . . raging . . . like a mad dog . . . I, Heracles, that have lived worthy of the faith that was in me that I am verily a son of Zeus. Ay, so they call me, and *Helper of Men* . . . 'tis true, I have done good service to many, ridding their lands of savage beasts and more savage tyrants. . . . Yet I lie here, forsaken of Zeus and all the gods, and of all mankind——'

'Not of *me*, father,' broke in Hyllus passionately. 'Look on me—here stand I, your son, devoted to your service. Command me what you will, and I will do it or die.'

Heracles raised himself, slowly and with pain,

from his recumbent posture, and leaning on one elbow, gazed long and hard on the youth's glowing face. Calmly then he said: 'My son, I read truth and loyalty in your face, and that is well—for in you lies now the burden of handing down untarnished the fame of Heracles. It is a great inheritance—may you prove worthy of it, and of the high fortunes destined to our house. For, at this last hour, I am given to know by some divine intimation that in ages yet to come the proudest states of Hellas shall be ruled by princes who boast descent from Hyllus, son of Heracles. But now, on your allegiance as my true and loving son, this is what you must do. Carry me straightway to the top of Mount Oeta, the hill that overlooks this town; there hew down pine-trees, and build a pyre of the logs, and lay me thereon—and set it on fire'.

'Alas!' said Hyllus to himself. 'The poison now works like madness in his brain.' Aloud he said: 'Sir, ask me anything but that. To lay you, yet living, on a funeral pyre, and set light to it . . . you must see I cannot . . . 'tis too horrible'.

Then answered Heracles in a low voice—but never tone so thrilled through nerve and vein of the hearer: 'Son, as thou art lief and dear, and

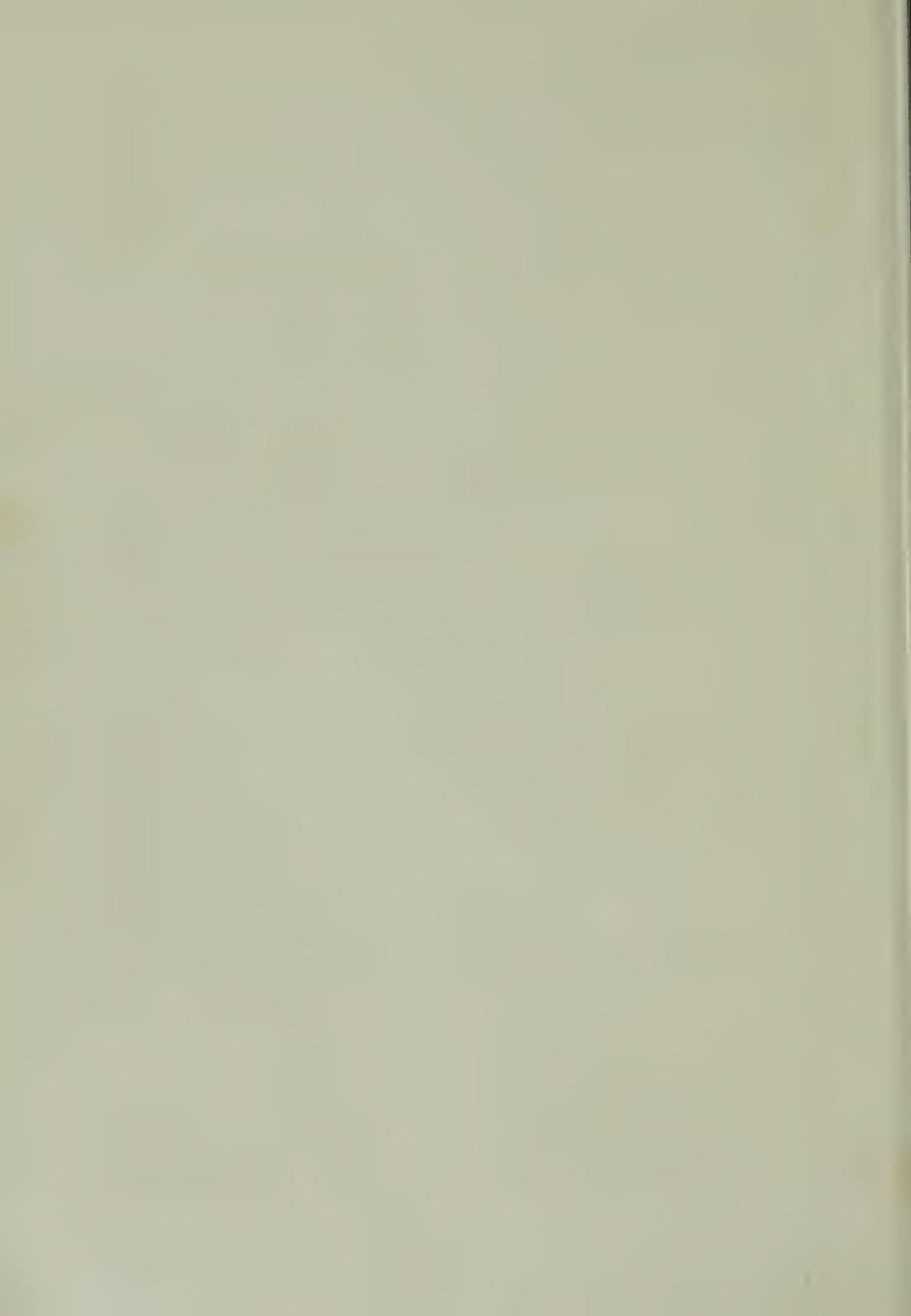
as thou wouldst avoid a father's curse, I charge thee to do my bidding, and with speed. For I am dying, Hyllus, dying—and I choose to die, not cabined here like a poisoned rat in a hole, but out yonder on the hill-top, under the starry sky, amidst mounting flames . . . that perchance may bear the soul of Heracles aloft with them . . . even to the heavenly hall where Zeus sits throned. Methinks I enter there, and the assembled gods rise up and bid me welcome to their feast . . . sweet Hebe fills my cup with nectar . . . my Father in his majesty smiles upon me. . . . No, no, 'tis but a dream, bred of the poison in my veins. Zeus . . . if Zeus there be . . . had not left his son to perish thus. . . . I can be none of his. But if I have no father, I have a son . . . it is to him I turn. My son, my son, will *you* fail me too, in my worst, last need?'

'I will not, indeed I will not,' Hyllus answered, weeping hot tears. 'All your commands shall be obeyed on the instant. Only, my father, pardon me in this one thing—I cannot, I dare not, set the torch to the pyre where you are laid . . . yet alive. Someone else must do that . . . if indeed any one can be found so steel-hearted.'

'Content you, my son,' said Heracles, 'for my

trusty squire, Philoctetes, will do me that last service, I know. Call him . . . he stands yonder somewhere, among my men-at-arms. Is he here? . . . Promise him, then, the reward of my bow and arrows, for kindling the pyre. For you must know, he is a good archer, and proud of it. . . . Does he consent? That is well. Now bear me forth to Mount Oeta—and quickly, quickly—I can no more. Farewell, my son, farewell!'

Having thus spoken, Heracles fell into a trance so deep and death-like that it was ever afterwards a question among eye-witnesses of the last scene, whether or no his spirit had passed before his body was laid upon the funeral pyre. Only they knew that his closed eyes opened no more on the world that through much toil and tribulation he had made better for his fellow-men. Calm and deep peace was on his worn face as they looked their last on it—and calm of mind fell on them also as they stood, gazing in silence, until a great curtain of flame, rushing heavenward with sound as of a mighty wind, hid him from their sight.





THE ATHENIAN GREETING

So to this day when friend meets friend the word of salute
Is still 'Rejoice!—his word, who brought rejoicing
indeed.

So is Pheidippides happy for ever, the noble, strong man
Who could race like a god, bear the face of a god, whom
a god loved so well.

He saw the land saved he had helped to save, was suffered
to tell

Such tidings, yet never decline, but gloriously as he began,
So to end gloriously—once to shout, thereafter be mute:
'Athens is saved!'—Pheidippides dies in the shout, for his
meed.

ROBERT BROWNING, *Pheidippides*.

'AND this, friend Herodotus, is my little grandson
—the darling of mine old age. Child of my heart,
leave your play and come hither. Here is an
honoured guest of our house, whom you have not
seen before. Give him greeting prettily.'

'Rejoice!' said a childish voice, gravely and
sweetly, in that language which is itself music.

'Rejoice thou likewise, little friend,' was the
answer, gently given.

And the child, looking up shyly, met the keen,
kindly eyes of the stranger with a smile—for there
was a twinkle in them, though his face was serious

and thoughtful. Eyes that seemed to notice everything with a sort of bird-like alertness—and now roved hither and thither over his grandfather's garden. . . .

'Truly, Cephalus,' exclaimed the stranger, turning to the old man, 'the lot is fallen unto you in a fair ground. How pleasant is this riverside garden of yours on this sweet spring morning! How soft and fresh the grass of this bank where we sit—and Ilissus flowing at our feet—how musically he plashes over the pebbles! . . . Look, there goes the first swallow. . . . And see the young leaves of the plane-tree above us, with the light shining through them—emeralds cannot match them for colour, nor Indian chrysoprase. Then, yonder, what a view we have of the city on her sacred rock—how her bulwarks and temples gleam pearl-like in the pure, bright air that it does one good to breathe! Ah, my friend, there is no place like Athens, after all.'

'We Athenians think so,' replied Cephalus simply; 'but that Herodotus of Halicarnassus has said it may well make us proud. Ay, glad I am that this child has heard those words—he will not forget them.' He drew the little boy on to his knee, and went on solemnly: 'Listen to me, son of my son. Remember as long as you

live that you have seen the famous Herodotus, and the words you heard him speak just now in praise of your own dear city. For he himself is a citizen of a great city in the beautiful land of Ionia; and, moreover, he has travelled over half the world and has seen the wonders of more cities and countries than I can tell you even the names of'.

'Is he a merchant, grandfather?' whispered the child. For he had seen merchant-ships in the harbour of Athens, and heard sailors talk of their far voyages to foreign ports.

'No,' said the grandfather. 'He travels not for gain, but from noble love of wisdom and knowledge, as did the Seven Sages long ago. And he is as wise as the best of them.'

'Enough, enough, old friend,' cried Herodotus, laughing. 'Do not deck me with borrowed plumes. Here is your grandchild looking at me with as much awe as if I were Solon himself; and no wonder! Nay, my little man—By the way, what do you call him, Cephalus? I mean, what is his pet name? His real name, of course, is the same as yours.'

(He said this, knowing that by Athenian custom the eldest son of an eldest son was named after his father's father, and while a child was

usually called at home by some ‘little name’, to avoid confusion.)

‘We call him Linnet,’ answered Cephalus, ‘and a merry one he is, twittering and chirping from morning to night.’

‘Well, little Linnet,’ Herodotus went on, ‘just this once, you must not believe your good grand-sire. In his kindness, he thinks too well of me. But I will tell you the truth—I am not nearly so like those Wise Men of old as I am like *you*, Linnet. For here are you in this large garden, which is full of all sorts of curious and delightful things, and you are never tired of looking at them, and asking questions about them—isn’t it so? Well, the wide world is just another such place—to me. And I, too, am never weary of beholding and admiring, and finding out all I can. I, too, am always asking: “What is this?” and: “What is that for?” and: “Why do you do so and so?” . . . You see, it is all so interesting—even the little, everyday things that most people don’t notice at all. For instance, when you greeted me just now, you said: “Rejoice!” Now, why did you say that?’

‘Because everybody does,’ said the child, looking puzzled. ‘You said it too, sir.’

‘I did,’ said Herodotus, ‘for at Athens one

must speak like the Athenians, and that is their word of salutation; and most other Greeks have learned it from them. But in other countries, people would wonder what you meant by it. And small blame to them; for why *should* a man rejoice whenever he happens to meet someone he knows in the street?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Linnet, looking still more puzzled. ‘But what do they say instead of “Rejoice”, then? Perhaps *that* doesn’t mean very much, either,’ he added, hopefully.

‘Shrewdly said, little one,’ the great traveller answered, smiling. ‘Every nation of mankind has its own form of greeting, and that form means little enough in the mouths of the users, whether they say: “Peace be with you”, like the Medes, or: “May you live for ever”, like the Persians, or ask after your health, like certain northern barbarians. Still, all these are greetings that need no explaining; you understand at once that they are addressed to you out of politeness. But when an Athenian comes up to you and tells you to rejoice, you want to know what you are to rejoice about—at least I did, being an inquisitive man.’

‘I should like to know, too,’ said Linnet eagerly. ‘Please, will you tell me—I am sure you found out.’

'Ask your grandfather,' said Herodotus. 'He can tell you far better than I can how the custom began. And it is a beautiful tale.'

'No, no,' said Cephalus. 'I cannot tell a story—never could. Do *you* tell it to us, Herodotus. You have the gift—and, well as I know it, I can never hear that tale too often. As for our Linnet, I can see he is longing to hear it.'

'I will do my best, then,' said Herodotus, 'for both your sakes.'

And this was the tale he told. . . .

I

'Many years ago, when your grandfather, Linnet, was a boy, a terrible danger threatened this city of Athens. For the citizens had offended the Great King, the King of Persia, the lord of all the Eastern world, by helping the Greeks who dwelt in his dominions to rebel against his tyranny; and in his wrath he vowed vengeance upon them, and sent forth a great fleet and army to destroy them utterly. He commanded that all the menfolk of Athens should be slain with the sword, all their women and children brought to Persia as slaves, and their city burnt to the ground. And word of his decree was

brought to the Athenians, together with the news that the Persian fleet was already nearing their coast.

'Now the Athenians were few, and their enemies a great multitude; yet, like good men and true, they resolved to fight to the death in defence of their country. So they mustered their little force—every citizen fit to bear arms was in the ranks—and elected commanders, of whom the chief was Miltiades, a brave man and a skilful general. And Miltiades, having called a council of war, proposed asking help from the Spartans, who had long been accounted the best soldiers in Greece. Some of the council shook their heads, and said that the Spartans had long been jealous of the rising power of Athens, and would not lift a finger to hinder her downfall. But others, and Miltiades among them, denounced this as a groundless and unworthy suspicion; and it was agreed at last to send an urgent appeal to Sparta by the swiftest messenger that could be found.

'There was a young Athenian by name Pheidippides, who was the most famous runner of the day, and had won countless prizes in the foot-races at the Great Games. This youth was chosen for the errand.'

'But he couldn't go as fast as a chariot, could he?' interrupted Linnet, who was listening with rapt attention.

'No,' said Herodotus, 'no runner could, except for a short distance. But, you see, a well-trained man can keep going longer without food or rest than a horse—and besides, the nearest way to Sparta lies over steep, craggy mountains where neither chariot nor saddle-horse can go at all. That was why the Athenians sent their message by a runner. . . . Well, away went Pheidippides with his message; up hill and down dale he raced as he had never raced to win the victor's garland; for now he ran for a greater stake, and the thought of his city's peril spurred him like a goad. More than a hundred miles of hilly country he must cover to reach Sparta; how he did it, he never knew—but on the third morning he was there, in the market-place of the city. I suppose he lay down and slept a little, now and then; as for food, he carried some bunches of raisins, some olives, and a few barley-scones in his satchel. That, with a drink from a wayside spring, was all he needed.'

'Now, when Pheidippides came full speed into the market-place of Sparta, it was thronged with citizens in holiday attire. For the Spartans hold

a great festival of Apollo, which they call the Carneia, in the month of September; that is to say, they keep the Carneia during the week before the full moon of that month. This day was the ninth of September, and the moon would be full on the twelfth; so Pheidippides had arrived in the very middle of the festival.

“A messenger from Athens,” he gasped out, breathless with running, as the crowd gathered round him. “Let me speak to your rulers.”

Now the rulers of Sparta are the two kings—why there are two you shall hear another time, Linnet—and certain chief magistrates who are called the Ephors. All these assembled forthwith in the Hall of Council; and there Pheidippides gave them the message he was charged to deliver. He knew that the Spartans were chary of speech, and prided themselves on never showing any signs of what they felt—neither grief, pain, pleasure, anger, or anything else. So he was not surprised that they listened with unmoved faces as he hurriedly told the sore need of Athens—how the Persian host was at her very doors, and her only hope lay in the valiant troops of Sparta marching instantly to the rescue; nor was he surprised when, as he paused, the Elder King asked him if that was all he had to say.

"“This is their way,” he thought, “and a provoking way, too—but I must fall in with it.” And curtly he answered: “Yes. But I must add, there is not a moment to lose——”

““You said that before,” interrupted the king.

““—and that I am ready to take back your answer this instant.”

““That is obvious. Do not waste words.”

The young man bit his lip to keep back an angry rejoinder. It would never do to offend these slow, pompous, cold-blooded Spartans—but how exasperating they were! He stood quivering like a leashed greyhound waiting to be let slip. . . .

““We will debate on this matter,” the king said deliberately. “Let the messenger from Athens withdraw meanwhile.”

‘And two attendants ushered Pheidippides from the hall to the pillared porch outside. The debate was short. After some thirty minutes—but every one seemed an hour to him in his burning impatience—he was brought in again. . . .

““Tell the Athenians,” said the Elder King, “that the Spartan army will march to their assistance on the fourth day from now. But not before. For this is the ninth day of the month, and the moon will not be full till the twelfth.

While the moon is waxing, we may not set out on an expedition; we must wait till she is full. That is an ancient law of Sparta."

"Wait for the full moon!" exclaimed Pheidippides. "Why, then you will not get to Athens for another week. All will be over by that time . . . the Persians must have landed already . . . you must start this very day, I tell you, if you are to save us."

"I have spoken," answered the king coldly. "Farewell, Athenian."

Pheidippides cast a despairing glance round the assembly. All sat rigid . . . it seemed to him that every face wore a look of hate and suspicion . . . every eye glittered with triumphant malice. Contempt filled his soul. This, then, was the real Sparta; to this depth of baseness she could descend—the state that claimed the leadership of all Greece! Yes, in their vile jealousy, the Spartans would stand by, looking on, while Athens perished under the heel of the barbarian. . . . "Athens, my Athens," he muttered to himself, "since there's no help, I'll come back to die with you." And with that, he rushed out of the Council Hall and out of the city, like a whirlwind.'

II

'The young man's thoughts were very bitter as he sped homewards along the rough mountain track. He had seen the wicked in great power; and he asked himself whether there could be any justice in the gods, who suffered such villainy to triumph. Why had not Zeus thundered a warning? Why had no heavenly messenger come down to bid Sparta repent, under pain of divine vengeance? Alas, it seemed that the gods themselves had abandoned Athens in her utmost need! And yet no city honoured them more devoutly—no folk in the world were more pious than the Athenians. Where was Pallas Athena, their own loved goddess . . . where were Phoebus and Artemis, mighty to save, and all that host of Olympians whose altars at Athens continually blazed with rich sacrifices? . . . And *this*, then, was their gratitude! . . .

'Such were his thoughts while he held swiftly on his way; when suddenly, as he ran down into a narrow, rocky glen, a deep voice called close by: "Halt, Pheidippides!"'

'Halt he did—looked right and left—beheld the speaker, and then stood fixed in awe and wonder.

'For it was the god Pan, he knew, who sat yonder—in a cleft of the rocks that was overhung with ivy and cushioned with velvety moss. The first glance showed him the goat-thighs below the grand human trunk; a second revealed that this was none of the hill-haunting satyr folk, but their king himself. To none other belonged that majestic countenance—that grave, kindly smile on the bearded lips, the smile of a god waiting to be gracious yet amused at a mortal's awe. . . .

"Come hither, Pheidippides, and fear not," the deep, musical voice went on. "I know you, and your errand, and I have somewhat to ask you. Why is it that among all the shrines, all the festivals in your city, there is none for Pan? Athens, alone among Greek cities, pays me no worship. Yet have I always befriended her, and will now, and for ever, if she will trust me. Go, bear her this message from me—the Goat-god bids her be of good courage and have faith in the temples and tombs; for they that inhabit these shall fight on her side. Go, say to the Athenians, when the Persian host, so much of it as strews not the battle-field, hath fled overseas—then let them thank Pan, who fought unseen in their ranks; ay, made common cause with the men who dared to die for liberty! Tell them that,

Pheidippides—and let this, foreshowing the place of combat, be the pledge that I will not fail them there. As for thyself, count on a worthy reward for thy good running." With that, the Goat-god plucked from the ground at his feet a handful of some green herbage, and held it out to Pheidippides. It was wild fennel, wet with the morning dew. The young Athenian grasped the token in reverent silence; then, as Pan made a gracious gesture of farewell, he turned and raced onward with new hope in his heart.'

III

'The next morning, Pheidippides told his wondrous tale to the Athenian generals in council. Then said the brave Miltiades, captain of them all: "We are at point to march out to the plain of Marathon, where scouts inform us that the Persians are even now about landing. May great Pan indeed succour us in the battle we must wage there! But you, Pheidippides, best of runners, whose strength and speed have done such noble service this day—tell us what the reward was that Pan promised you".

'Blushing at the great general's praise, the youth answered: "He did not say what it would

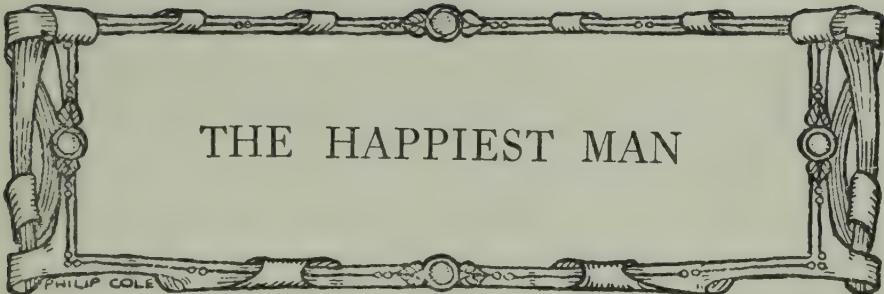
be, Miltiades. But I dare to hope Pan meant, I am to fight along with my comrades on whatever field this fennel betokens, and help drive the barbarians into the sea; and then—when Athens is safe—marry a certain maiden I am betrothed to . . . perhaps some day see our children playing round me, and tell them how that great and kind god rewarded their father”.

‘But the reward was to be something far different from this. And it came very soon. For ten days later was fought the glorious battle of Marathon that every Athenian child is told the story of at his mother’s knee—the battle that saved Greece and first humbled the pride of Persia. Yes, you know *that* story, little Linnet, I see, though you have not heard yet about Pheidippides.

‘Well, Pheidippides marched with the rest to that great fight; and when he saw the place where they must encounter the enemy, he understood Pan’s token, for it was covered with wild fennel. And in truth, the name *Marathon* means “Fennel-field”. He was one of the foremost in that famous charge that broke the Persian line—his spear did right good service in the rout and slaughter of their mighty host. Then, when the day was won for Athens, cries arose from the

victors: "Run, Pheidippides! Take the news to the city! Ay, let Pheidippides tell the tidings—he deserves it!"

'And he flung down his shield and ran. It is twenty-four miles from that Fennel-field to Athens; the fight had been desperate; but without sense of weariness he rushed onward, and never paused until he burst into the anxious, pale-faced throng at the city gate. . . . Gathering his last of breath, "Rejoice! We conquer!" he shouted, in a voice like a trumpet. With that, voice and strength failed him, and he fell down like one in a swoon. But when they lifted him up, Pheidippides was dead.'



THE HAPPIEST MAN

PHILIP COLE

Fear no more the heat o' the sun,
Nor the furious winter's rages;
Thou thine earthly task hast done,
Home art gone and ta'en thy wages.

Dirge in *Cymbeline*.

Respice Finem

My soul, sit thou a patient looker-on;
Judge not the play before the play is done:
Her plot hath many changes; every day
Speaks a new scene; the last act crowns the play.

FRANCIS QUARLES.

'BUT,' said the little boy, when Herodotus had finished his story, 'was it not very hard that Pheidippides should die, just when he was so happy? Was *that* the reward Pan meant?'

'To die when he was so happy,' repeated Herodotus; 'happier than he could ever be again if he lived a hundred years . . . when his heart was throbbing with bliss so intense that it killed him . . . to pass away in that wonderful moment, with no pain. Yes, that was Pheidippides' reward. For the gods themselves could give him nothing better. They could do only

one thing more—they made him happy for ever. . . . Do you understand now, my child?’

‘I think I do,’ said Linnet thoughtfully. ‘Athens was saved—and he had helped . . . and then, to run so splendidly and tell all the people the good news. . . . No, all that could never happen again. But, if Pheidippides had lived, he would always have *remembered* it, wouldn’t he?’

‘And that would have made him happy, you think,’ said Herodotus with a sigh. ‘Ah, child, may you never feel in coming years how truly said some ancient sage: “No sharper pain than to remember happier things in hours of misery”. And those hours come, soon or late, to every man upon this earth. Why, even the Heroes of old—men of a mightier race than ours and sprung from the gods—suffered griefs and troubles manifold; even Peleus and Cadmus, renowned above them all for their good fortune. You have heard of those two, I am sure, my Linnet—for nurses sing rhymes about them over children’s cradles.’

‘Yes, *my* nurse used to do that,’ said Linnet eagerly. ‘She sang a song that began:

May you be lucky, my Baby dear,
As ever King Peleus and Cadmus were;
For the gods gave each a lovely wife,
Health and wealth and a long, long life—

I forget how it went on, but there was nothing about their having any troubles, I know, nor who they were. Will you please tell me that story, sir?’

‘Why, I think I had better not,’ said Herodotus, smiling pleasantly. ‘For one thing, a poet named Pindar has told it so well already that when you are a little older you will be glad to hear it for the first time in his great verse. For another thing, though I love story-telling, I make it a rule to relate only what I have myself seen, or what I have good testimony for believing to have really happened. Understand me—I do not say the marvellous tales of poets concerning the Heroes of past ages are not true. Nay, I devoutly believe them, for my own part. But I will not put them forth to the world on my authority.’

‘My friend,’ interposed old Cephalus, who had been placidly listening all this time, ‘you do but bewilder the child when you talk thus. If you must speak of truth, testimony, and the like, address yourself rather to his grandsire. I, simple as I am, can make shift to understand your distinctions between one story and another; but ’tis no task for a boy of nine summers, forward though he is.’

‘Your rebuke, my worthy host, is both just

and well-timed,' answered Herodotus with un-ruffled good humour; 'I bow to it, and will say no more.'

But thereupon Linnet protested with all the vehemence of a spoiled child:

'No, no, grandfather! I *do* understand—I want to hear more.'

'More about Peleus and Cadmus, little one?' asked Herodotus, with a laughing eye. 'Well, if you must have it—after much tribulation, they were each wedded to a divine bride—Peleus to Thetis, the Sea-god's daughter; and Cadmus to Harmonia, child of golden Aphrodite. And the gods who live for ever sat at both wedding-feasts, and bestowed gifts upon the happy bridegrooms; and for Peleus on Mount Pelion, and for Cadmus in seven-gated Thebes, the divine Muses sang the marriage-lay. And both those Heroes, as the nursery rhyme has it, lived healthy and wealthy to a green old age. Yet mark—Peleus saw his only son, Achilles, perish in his flower at the great siege of Troy; Cadmus, through his daughters' sin against the gods, saw his heir strangely murdered, and ended his days in exile. Thus fared those two acclaimed favourites of the gods. Much less, my child, can ordinary mortals expect abiding good fortune.'

‘Then is nobody really happy?’ asked Linnet wistfully.

‘Nay, I said not so,’ answered Herodotus, and, ‘The gods forbid!’ exclaimed Cephalus, both at once.

‘Come, do not look so downcast, little friend, went on the former. ‘Tis my fault, I see; but you shall have another story to make amends—and the story will answer your question.’

At this, Linnet smiled again, and Herodotus thus began:

I

‘There was a time, long ago, when the city of Athens was in great distress and disorder through the feuds and quarrels of her own citizens. The rich oppressed the poor, and the poor hated and envied the rich; the noble families quarrelled among themselves, and some of them stirred up the commons to lawlessness, out of spite against their own kinsmen who were in authority. At last, weary of riots and bloodshed, the Athenians agreed to appoint some wise and upright man to frame a set of laws by which rich and poor might have equal justice, and their city be peaceably governed. And with one accord they chose one

of their own citizens, whose name was Solon. Now Solon, being indeed a wise man, would not undertake this task until the Athenians had bound themselves by a solemn oath not to alter laws he gave them for ten years, except with his consent; which when they did, he forthwith took ship and sailed away to far countries, and there remained until the ten years were over. For he knew their love of change, and that if he stayed at home they would try to force him to repeal his laws as soon as they grew tired of them. He had, moreover, a great desire to see the world, and seek knowledge and wisdom from men of other countries; but nothing but the reason I have told you made him banish himself all those years from his own city.

'Now after travelling far and wide and seeing many wonders, Solon arrived at the court of Croesus, King of Lydia, who was said to be the richest man in the world. A most gorgeous court it was, and much visited by travellers, for Croesus was as hospitable as he was rich. He received Solon courteously, and entertained him magnificently for three days; after that, he ordered some attendants to take him round the royal treasury and show him everything that was there. Vaults packed with gold ingots; huge

piles of ivory, amber, silver; sacks of rubies, pearls, and emeralds; room after room full of armour, vessels, and ornaments all of pure gold and exquisitely wrought—all this and more was displayed to the Athenian stranger. He looked at it all attentively, but said nothing. And when, having seen everything, he was led back to the king's presence, still not a word did he say about the splendours that had been shown to him.

'Then Croesus, who loved compliments, and was expecting Solon to make him a flattering speech, imagined he was tongue-tied by the sight of such vast riches, and resolved to give him a cue.

"‘My Athenian guest,’’ he said, smiling graciously, “your fame as a great traveller and a great observer has reached Lydia before you. I wish therefore to ask you, who is the happiest man you have ever seen?’’

“‘Tellus the Athenian,’’ replied Solon, without hesitating an instant.

“Indeed?” said Croesus, with a look of vexation. “I should have thought . . . but no matter. May I know *why* you consider this Tellus, of whom I never heard, the happiest of men?”

“Because, in the first place,” said Solon, “he was citizen of a free and well-governed commonwealth—for such was Athens during his time;

also, he had good and brave sons, and lived to see their children growing up full of promise. Above all, after enjoying as much happiness as can be looked for by mere mortals, he made a glorious and happy end. For Tellus died in battle for his country, and in the hour of victory. He was buried at the public cost on the field where he fell, and the highest honours were decreed to his memory."

"Your idea of happiness," said Croesus, after a pause, "is quite new to me, and very perplexing. Perhaps I might understand it better if you were to tell me whom you reckon the next happiest man to Tellus."

'But in his vanity he was thinking: "Though this uncourtly Athenian will not put me first, he will surely at least put me second'.

"Next after Tellus," said Solon, "Cleobis and Biton, citizens of Argos, are the two happiest persons within my knowledge. You, King of Lydia, will no more have heard of *them* than of *him*; but since you desire to hear me further on this theme, I will relate their story. . . .

"Argos, a very ancient city, has ever been under the especial patronage of the goddess Hera, who has a famous temple there. Every year the Argives choose a woman of noble family to serve

for twelve months as Hera's priestess; then a great festival is held, during which the new priestess is brought in a car drawn by oxen to the temple, where she dwells during her year of office.

"Now Cleobis and Biton were the sons of a noble Argive lady named Praxilla; these brothers were near of an age, and from their birth until they were some eighteen summers old they lacked nothing to make them completely happy. Well-born, and citizens of no mean city, they had a moderate fortune; they had not only sound health but superb bodily strength — already, indeed, they had won glory for Argos by victories in the Great Games. . . .

"Such and so fortunate were these two lads, when it befell that their mother Praxilla was chosen Hera's priestess. *Then* the roof and crown was set upon their happiness".

"How was that," asked Croesus, "if they were as happy as they could be already?"

"You shall hear, king," answered Solon. "The house where Praxilla lived with her sons was on a manor she owned, some leagues out of the city, and still more distant from Hera's temple, which stood on a hill outside Argos. So, very early on the morning of the festival, she made herself ready for her journey. The car was ready also;

but by some mistake or negligence of the farm-thralls, the oxen that should have drawn it had been driven to work on an outlying field, and were already far away. None others could be got near at hand—and no time must be lost, if the priestess was not to arrive too late for the solemn sacrifice at which she must take the leading part.

. . . Praxilla wrung her hands in despair, and began to weep; but her sons lovingly bade her trust to them and be of good cheer. Then quick as thought they lifted her to her seat in the car, and set their necks under the yoke; and putting forth all their youthful vigour they drew her the whole way to the temple, in good time for the sacrifice.

“Now the assembled folk, seeing Praxilla thus brought among them, and hearing what the two lads had done, were moved to great admiration. All the men loudly praised their feat of strength; all the women cried: ‘How blessed is the mother of such sons!’ Then Praxilla, in a transport of joy and pride, hurried within the temple, and standing before Hera’s image she lifted up her hands and prayed thus aloud: “O holy and heavenly queen, vouchsafe now a boon to thy priestess! Forasmuch as my dear sons have so honoured their mother this day in the sight of

all Argos, grant them, I pray thee, the greatest blessing that the gods can bestow on mortal men'.

“Thus she prayed; and the gods, who see with other and clearer eyes than ours, straightway granted her prayer. For when they had joined in the holy rites of the day, and shared the joyous banqueting that followed, Cleobis and Biton laid them down to rest that night in a chamber of the temple, and fell peacefully asleep—to wake no more.

“In them was made manifest the truth of the ancient saying: ‘Those whom the gods love die young’. Yes, in the prime of their youth, the height of their happiness, with such fair prospects opening before them, those two were snatched in a moment out of life. Whereby, O Croesus, the Divine Power that rules over all things signified plainly that death is better than life, for man that is born of woman.”

Croesus listened with what patience he could to the story of Cleobis and Biton; but when Solon made an end of speaking he burst forth angrily:

“Do you hold me so cheap, then, Athenian stranger, though you have seen my power and riches and glory—I say, am I, Croesus of Lydia, the richest and mightiest monarch alive, of such

small account in your eyes that you rate obscure and private persons above *me* in point of felicity?"

"Ah, Croesus," answered Solon, "remember that you have sought my opinion concerning human happiness. And who am I? One who knows the Divine Power to be ever jealous, ever working change and confusion. One who knows that Time in his course brings to every man many things he would fain neither see happen to others nor endure himself—yet must he both see and endure them. And consider this—a man's life is threescore years and ten; that is, twenty-six thousand two hundred and fifty days, according to our Greek reckoning of months and years. Yet out of so vast a number, not one day is exactly like another. Neither when any day dawns can we tell what it may bring forth. Thus you see, Croesus, we men are but playthings of Fortune."

The king still frowned, ill-pleased. Solon regarded him earnestly, and went on:

"Be not offended, my royal host, though I cannot speak as you wish. For though I see you are lord of vast treasures and a great kingdom, I cannot call you a *happy* man until I hear that you have made a happy end. Nay, I must tell

you this—the richest of men is no happier than he who has enough to live in modest comfort, and many a rich man is miserable. My countryman Tellus, and the two Argive lads, of whom I have told you, had but little wealth, though sufficient for their needs. *Their* blessings were such as I have said—liberty, health, personal strength and beauty, family honour and affection—and in the case of Tellus, good children. But note, Croesus, that even a man who has all these good gifts I call not *happy* but *fortunate*—unless they abide with him till his life's end. For to many a man the Divine Power shows as it were a glimpse of happiness for a season, and afterwards casts him down into wretchedness. We ought therefore to call no man happy until he is dead; and before we pass judgment on a life or on anything else, we must *look to the end*."

'This discourse of Solon did not lessen the king's displeasure. Croesus coldly bade him farewell, and dismissed him without the mark of royal favour—a gift of gold or jewels—which he usually bestowed on distinguished strangers. For he said to himself: "This reputed sage, I find, is a very ignorant fellow—a mere blockhead. Otherwise, he would not shut his eyes to all my glory and grandeur, and prate to me about *looking to the end*".

‘But Solon, having answered the king according to his judgment and conscience, tranquilly went his way.’

II

‘There came a time, however, when Croesus called to mind the words of the stranger from Athens, and, with bitter cause, acknowledged that they were words of wisdom.

Great and powerful as the King of Lydia was, a more powerful and a far wiser king presently arose in the East, and that was Cyrus, King of Persia. This warlike prince no sooner came to his throne than he set about adding new territories to the Persian realm; and soon his conquests reached almost to the River Halys, which was the eastern boundary of Lydia. Then Croesus, alarmed, and jealous of his rising power, resolved to make war on Cyrus. But first, being a religious man, he wished to seek counsel of the gods. And having heard the fame of the ancient Oracle at Delphi in Greece, where the god Apollo gave response to inquiries by the mouth of his priestess, he prepared to send envoys thither with magnificent offerings—a golden lion, huge bowls and vases of solid gold and silver, and the most

splendid jewelled necklaces and girdles of his queen. And the envoys were to inquire of the god: "How will Croesus fare, if he makes war on the Persians?"

'But before he sent this embassy, Croesus thought it well to test the truth of the Oracle; and this was the test he devised. He sent trusty messengers to Delphi with orders that on the hundredth day from their leaving his city of Sardis, they should demand of Apollo's priestess what Croesus, King of Lydia, was doing on that day, and bring back her answer in writing. And the messengers returned, bringing this written answer:

"I know the number of the sands, and can reckon the drops in the sea. I understand the dumb, and hear the voiceless. Lo, I smell the mingled savour of a hard-shelled tortoise and of lamb's flesh boiling together in a cauldron—bronze is the cauldron, and bronze the cover."

'Croesus no sooner read this response than he fell down and worshipped the god Apollo. For having thought of something no human being could guess he would be doing, he had gone to the kitchens on the appointed day, chopped up a tortoise and a lamb with his own hands, and boiled them together in a bronze cauldron with a bronze lid. And being thus convinced that

Apollo did verily speak through the Delphic Oracle, he straightway sent off the envoys with those rich offerings and the question I have mentioned.

'The answer they brought back was in these words: "If he makes war on Persia, Croesus will destroy a great empire". Whereupon Croesus was overjoyed, and calling his lords and captains together he commanded that his host should be set in array with all speed, and march across the frontier to attack the Persians; "for the god at Delphi," said he, "has promised me the victory". So Croesus went forth to battle, exulting.

'Now at that time no nation in all the East was more valiant and warlike than the Lydians; their whole army was cavalry, the finest in the world, superbly mounted and trained, and armed with long lances. Cyrus, like the great soldier he was, at first sight of their array knew that his own force, which was mainly infantry, could not stand before their charge, and swiftly he devised a stratagem. He ordered the train of camels that carried the provisions and baggage of the army to be unloaded; mounted some horse-soldiers on them, and drew them up in front of his infantry, keeping his cavalry in the rear. On came the Lydians at the charge; but their

foremost horses no sooner saw and smelt the camels than they wheeled round, terrified beyond all control, and dashing on the squadrons behind them, threw the whole body into wild confusion. Soon a stampede began, as their riders tried to force rearward squadrons to the charge, and more and more horses winded or caught sight of the camels. Those beasts, you see, were new to the Lydians; so they did not know, as Cyrus did, that the horse is horribly afraid of the camel, and cannot endure the very smell of one. But when this now dawned upon them, they leaped from their saddles, letting the maddened horses rush away; and gallantly they fought on foot, shoulder to shoulder, against the advancing Persians. But not for long could they make a stand against such odds. Hundreds fell; the rest, Croesus among them, fled back, a broken army, to his city of Sardis. . . .

'Fourteen days later the Persian king was master of the city, and Croesus a captive in his hands. Now the citadel of Sardis was strongly fortified and built on a precipitous rock; Croesus had shut himself up there with great store of treasure and provisions, believing that it could hold out many months against a siege; meanwhile he had sent prayers and lavish bribes to various allies to

come and rescue him. And indeed, all might have fallen out as he hoped, but for an accident. When Cyrus had besieged Sardis for a fortnight, he let proclaim a large reward in gold to the first man who made his way into the citadel—for he saw it could not be taken by storm. There was one part of the rock so sheer towards the top that it looked impossible to be scaled, and therefore no guard was posted on the rampart above it. The day before, however, a certain Persian soldier had seen a Lydian, who was cleaning his armour, let his helmet fall over the rampart. It stuck in a bush at the foot of the precipice—and to his surprise, the Lydian forthwith climbed down after it. Very slowly, very cautiously, he made his way down, and up again, feeling with feet and hands for certain projections and crannies of the rock-face, which the Persian carefully noted. And next day, hearing of the reward, this soldier climbed up in the same way, followed by two or three comrades; they let down rope-ladders, by which numbers ascended; and the citadel being thus surprised, the whole town was quickly taken and sacked.

‘Now Cyrus had given strict commands, both before the battle and when he began the siege, that the King of Lydia should be taken alive.

But when the Persian soldiers took the citadel and put all the garrison to death, one of them rushed into his chamber, and was about to kill him, not knowing who he was. And Croesus, though he saw the sword pointed at his breast, neither spoke nor stirred, but looked at it with utter indifference; so stunned was his mind by sudden disaster. Another instant, and he would have been a dead man. But then a miracle happened. . . .

'There was with him his favourite son, a lad fair in mind and body, but dumb from his birth. For years Croesus had offered untold gold to any that would heal him, and when all physicians failed, had consulted the Delphic Oracle, with no better success. For the response was: "O foolish king, desire not to hear thy son's voice in thy palace-halls; better for thee that should never betide, for he will first speak in an unhappy house". And Croesus in his disappointment had harboured doubts as to the truth of Apollo's Oracle, until he proved it in the way I have told you. But now he was to have a proof yet more wondrous. . . . In the anguish of seeing the sword raised to slay his father, the dumb boy's tongue was loosed, and he cried out: "Man, kill not Croesus!"'

'These were the first words he ever uttered; but thenceforward the power of speech remained with him all his life.'

'The poor boy!' exclaimed Linnet. 'I am so glad about him—I like that part of the story best. But did the Persian soldier listen to him?'

'Indeed he did,' said Herodotus, 'and was greatly frightened to think how nearly he had killed the Lydian king, for which Cyrus would have punished him with death. So Croesus was led a prisoner out of his city and into the Persian camp, and brought before his conqueror.

'Now Cyrus, it is well known, was not a cruel man, but one that loved justice and showed mercy even to his enemies. I therefore believe that he had some special reason for what he now did. He caused a huge pyre to be built of logs and faggots; and had Croesus, bound hand and foot with iron fetters, placed upon it to be burned alive. Perhaps he followed ancestral custom by sacrificing such first-fruits of victory to the gods of Persia—or he may have been fulfilling a vow—or else, as I think most likely, he may have heard that Croesus was a very pious man, and wished to see whether any of his gods would deliver him. But be that as it may.

'Meanwhile, Croesus seemed still too dazed

with misery to heed what was passing; he was placed unresisting on the pyre and stood there like one in a trance while it was being kindled. Suddenly, then, he came to himself, and that same instant the words flashed through his mind: "Call no man happy while he yet lives". And now he knew they were words of inspired truth. He uttered a deep groan, and thrice called aloud the name of Solon. Cyrus, who sat to watch at a little distance, hearing Croesus, as he thought, invoke some god, bade his interpreters go near and ask who it was he called upon. Croesus would not answer for a while; at last, when they urged him, he said: "I named a man whose discourse it would more profit all kings to hear than to own all the riches upon earth". The interpreters were none the wiser, and pressed him to explain; he shook his head and remained silent. Still they plied him with questions; till at length, wearied by their importunity, he briefly told them how Solon, an Athenian, had once visited him, surveyed his treasures with quiet scorn, and uttered a discourse on the vanity of mortal things which now, too late, came home to his bosom.

'All this the interpreters repeated to Cyrus. And the great king was much moved, reflecting

that he, too, was but a man, and subject to like reverses of fortune with the fellow-mortal, so lately his equal in power and glory, whom he was destroying. Croesus had wantonly provoked him—yet who could tell whether the high gods, to whom vengeance belonged, might not be wroth with him for presuming to exact it beyond due measure? So thinking, Cyrus commanded his guards to put out the fire instantly, and take Croesus down.

'But by this time the base of the pyre was well alight, and for all the soldiers could do, the flames kept mounting higher. All the water-skins in the camp were emptied, and more water quickly brought from a neighbouring stream; yet the sappy pine-logs and dry brushwood burned even more fiercely. Then Croesus, perceiving that Cyrus had a favour towards him, no longer wished to die; bursting into tears, he cried with a loud voice: "Apollo! Apollo! Save thou me now, if ever my offerings at holy Delphi were acceptable in thy sight".

'Even as he spoke the clear sky was darkened with clouds; the next instant a heavy shower of rain extinguished the blazing pyre.

'Convinced by this miracle that Croesus was a man beloved of the gods and truly virtuous,

Cyrus had him taken down from the pyre, released from his fetters, and set in a seat of honour at his own right hand. Then, addressing him with the respect due to an equal: "Who persuaded you, King Croesus," he said, "to invade my territories, and to become my enemy, instead of my friend?"

"Great king," answered Croesus, "what I have done has been to my own loss, and to your gain. The cause of both was that god of the Greeks whom they call Apollo, by whose counsel I went to war. Of myself, I had never done so, seeing that the veriest fool knows that peace is better than war. For in peace, children bury their fathers; but in war, fathers bury their children. However, I suppose it pleased the gods that my enterprise should end in this manner."

Now while they talked thus, Croesus lifted up his eyes and saw troop after troop of the Persian soldiery returning to camp, laden with plunder from his city. He watched them awhile in silence, then said: "Does it befit me, King Cyrus, to tell you my present thoughts, or rather to hold my peace?"

"I am always best pleased with frankness," answered the Persian.

"Let me ask you, then," said Croesus, "what

those crowds of your soldiery are so busy about, that we see coming and going yonder."

"They are sacking your city," answered Cyrus, "and plundering your treasury."

"You mean *your* city and *your* treasury, O king," rejoined his captive dryly.

Cyrus was struck with the wisdom of this remark. He at once ordered his officers and guards to withdraw out of earshot, then: "Wise Lydian," he said, "I take your meaning, and since you give me friendly counsel, be assured I will treat you henceforth as a friend. Yonder men, as you well observe, are looting property which is now mine by fortune of war. But how am I to stop them? For by our Persian custom, which I hold sacred, my soldiers have the right to pillage a conquered town. Nay, to forbid them now were to risk mutiny".

"Sire," replied Croesus, "since the gods have made me your servant, it is my duty to advise you as well as I can. Consider, then, that your Persians are as yet a poor nation, but haughty, fierce, and turbulent; to put wealth into the hands of such men is the surest way to breed rebellion. And there is treasure enough in Sardis to enrich your whole army, if you let them take it. So my advice is this—proclaim forthwith that you

intend to dedicate a tenth of the spoils of Sardis to your god, wherefore every man must bring whatever booty he has already taken to an appointed place, that the whole may be reckoned. And as far the greater part remains yet untouched, set guards at each gate of the city with orders to prevent any more plunder being brought out until the royal scribes and overseers have made a survey, and rendered you an account of all the wealth they find. When this has been done, and the tenth set apart, you can distribute as much of the spoil as you think proper among the soldiers, reserving the rest for yourself. Thus, sire, you may put a stop to their pillaging without offending them. For, being religious themselves, they will revere your piety; and being ignorant in such matters, they can have no idea what vast wealth Sardis contains."

'Cyrus was delighted with this plan, and ordered it to be carried out immediately. "I see, Croesus," said he, "that you are resolved to keep a kingly mind in your adversity. Your giving me good counsel, instead of bearing me malice, shows you are as magnanimous as you are wise. Henceforth you are no longer my prisoner, but my honoured guest. And to requite the service you have just rendered me, name what

boon you will and I will grant it, to the half of my kingdom." But Croesus said he desired nothing but leave to send his fetters to the god at Delphi, whom he had honoured above all gods, and to upbraid him for deceiving one who had deserved so well of him. Cyrus inquired what the deceit was, and having heard the whole story of Croesus' dealings with the Oracle, he smiled and said: "You shall obtain not only this, but whatever else you ask of me at any time".

'So Croesus sent certain Lydians to Delphi on that errand. When they entered the temple, they laid the fetters before the image of Apollo and delivered this message to the priestess: "Croesus presents to Apollo these first fruits of the war with the Persians, and asks if he is not ashamed of persuading him to that war by a lying oracle that he should overthrow Cyrus. He asks also if it is the nature of the gods of Greece to be ungrateful".

'Then the Pythia—so the Delphic priestess is called, silently took her seat on the tripod in the inner shrine, whence she delivers her responses; presently the spirit of the god came upon her, and she answered after this manner:

"The gods themselves cannot avert the decrees of the Fates. It was ordained that

Sardis should fall in the days of Croesus; Apollo therefore could not save it, yet for the king's sake he prevailed with the Fates to delay its capture for three years. Let Croesus know that he prospered three years beyond his destined hour by grace of Apollo; let him remember who delivered him from the burning pyre. As touching the oracle he received, let him blame his own folly, and not the god. For Apollo foretold that if he warred against Persia he would overthrow a great empire. Had Croesus not been blinded by his own conceit, he would have sent again to inquire whether that empire was the Persian or the Lydian."

'It is said that on hearing this reply from his messengers, Croesus acknowledged that the blame rested with himself, and gave thanks to Apollo for his mercies. For this once proud king, who had rejected and despised the lesson of Solon, learned wisdom from the stern teacher, Adversity. He grew so wise, indeed, that he became one of the most trusted counsellors of the great Cyrus, at whose court he dwelt highly honoured until his death.

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